

THE
HISTORY OF WOMAN,

AND HER CONNEXION
WITH
RELIGION, CIVILIZATION, AND DOMESTIC MANNERS,
FROM THE EARLIEST PERIOD.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE CHRISTIAN AND BYZANTINE EMPIRE	1
II.	
BARBAROUS NATIONS	57
III.	
THE DARK AND MIDDLE AGES	81
IV.	
THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA	166
V.	
THE TUDOR PERIOD	184
VI.	
LATTER DAYS	268

THE HISTORY OF WOMAN.

I.

THE CHRISTIAN AND BYZANTINE EMPIRE.

WHILE the gorgeous sun of Rome was sinking in the ocean of time, a brighter light, destined never to set, slowly arose in the East, and, at length, spread wide over the earth on the wings of another morning.

Christianity numbered women among its first converts; and at a time when the Saviour had nowhere to lay his head, he received consolation and succour from his female disciples. Hence the most touching episodes of the Gospel refer to women; and the penitent of Samaria at Jacob's well,

listening to the divine words of the Redeemer—the Magdalen at his feet, washing them with her tears, Mary and Martha at their brother's grave, the sorrowing relatives that “stood by the Cross,” when the followers of sterner mould “forsook him and fled,” and, lastly, the weeping mourners at the sepulchre, are pictures, by which the mind is willingly enchained, and which, once contemplated, can never be forgotten.

The new religion had much to attract and to rivet the earnest affection of woman : its precepts sank into her heart, while, in their effect, they purified and reclaimed her soul. Patience, endurance, submission were virtues, indeed, which she had long had to practise, but they were now required equally from the other sex, and enforced by a divine example. What the false standard of man's fallen nature had represented as chivalry, or as heroism, was now pronounced to be violence, blood-guiltiness, and sin ; and humanity was taught the beautiful lesson of yielding itself to the hand of God, of suffering even wrong in silence, and of returning good for evil. A blameless and holy life,

not only in demeanour, in words, and in action, but in the thoughts, in the inmost soul, was mildly, but rigidly demanded; and woman found at the foot of the Cross both temporal and eternal redemption.

But the great mass of the world was not to be easily penetrated by such a leaven; and so early as the age of the Apostles, we meet, in the eloquent epistles of St. Paul, with but too many instances of its incorrigible depravity. It is the characteristic of all human societies that some are ever inclined to fall back, some are eager for change, and continually thirst for novelty, and some are carried away by every wind of doctrine; and hence, in course of time, arise the most deplorable errors, diversities of opinion, discord, dissensions, and schisms, which rend the nearest and dearest ties. But the pure flame of Christianity continued to burn unclouded for four hundred years: it survived the three great persecutions; and was only obscured, or rather corrupted, by the blighting protection of Constantine.

Helena, the mother of that ruthless Em-

peror, whom the Roman Catholic church admitted to the dubious honours of canonization, as a benefactress and saint, was animated by a fervent zeal for the propagation of the faith ; but to achieve this object, she employed unsuitable and unworthy means. Her observant eye quickly perceived that the spirituality of her creed, the innate testimony to its heavenly origin, was the greatest obstacle to its universal acceptance, since minds enveloped in pagan darkness clung to the delusion of a palpable god ; and to obviate such a difficulty, she resolved, instead of seeking to raise mankind to the level of Christianity, to sink Christianity to the level of mankind. Accordingly she gave orders for the construction of a cross, which was secretly buried, and then, as if under inspiration, disinterred, and solemnly pronounced to be the True Cross, on which the Redeemer had suffered ; and, as such, declared to be a fit object of reverence, and set up for the worship of the world. Such was the origin of the adoration of the crucifix, which, however, was soon followed by other innovations, and the

knee which bowed to a log of wood, was soon bent before the image of a saint, the bone of a martyr, a lock of hair, a tooth, or a napkin.

Among the Romans, as among the Jews, women had been the most active missionaries of Christianity; and, through their instrumentality, it gained some of its most eminent and remarkable converts. Long before the accession of Constantine, many a Nicodemus had sat in the fallen senate of Rome, or at the council-board of the pagan Casars; and it was doubtless the powerful organization of the Christian community, as much as any alleged miracle, that kindled the light of an interested faith in the tyrant's soul. Nor did the pious zeal of woman diminish, when the infant church, after being cradled in hardship, found itself wallowing in the downy lap of luxury. Athanasius, Jerome, Chrysostom—from his eloquence called “the golden-mouthed”—had each their crowds of ministering Priscillas, who deemed their words inspired, and their decisions oracular. Pachonius established the first convent, in which

women found a refuge from the vanities and the duties of life ; and his pernicious example was speedily followed by Athanasius, who, passing from Egypt to Rome, preached in the West the crusade of monastic discipline. The illustrious Paula, after lavishing immense sums on indigent and lazy monks, was herself tempted, by the hot zeal of Jerome, to enter a "convent, and unfeelingly dedicated her youthful daughter to the same bondage, receiving as a reward for her devotion, the blasphemous appellation of mother-in-law of God. Royalty was not exempt from the conventual yoke ; and the Empress Pulchéria, though she shared her throne with the prudent Marcian, as her nominal husband, remained a nun throughout her life." The fair Melania threw her plate into the abyss of monkish cupidity, that treasury without a bottom, yet could scarcely satisfy its inordinate cravings ; and a Benedictine friar, whom indolence or penury had driven to the cloister, candidly avowed, in an unguarded moment, that "his vow of poverty had given him a hundred thousand crowns a year, and his

vow of obedience raised him to the rank of a sovereign prince."

In the reign of Valentinian, the spoliation of the property of devout women by rapacious monks and priests, who had obtained the direction of their consciences, was carried to such an extent, that severe laws were enacted for the suppression of the evil; and a confessor was incapacitated from receiving any legacy or bequest from his fair penitents. Still, means were found to evade the statutes; and Damasus, Bishop of Rome, their guardian and administrator, was himself so deeply implicated in such proceedings, that he acquired the odious *soubriquet* of "the ladies' ear-scratcher." St. Jerome does not escape a similar imputation, and he was assuredly not wanting in zeal for the aggrandizement of the church.

These pages must not be sullied with any details of the lamentable depravity which soon characterised the religious houses; and extorted from the sixth general council, after the clearest evidence, more stringent rules for their regulation and reformation. The moral rottenness of

Christians, indeed, was not confined to the convents: it was equally apparent in the laity, and pervaded the whole mass of the sinking empire. But while mankind threw aside the spirit, they claimed implicit adhesion for the letter of Christianity, according as it was interpreted by particular individuals; and the Trinitarians, Arians, and Nestorians, were all bent, not only on obtaining the ascendancy, but the absolute universal acceptance of their conflicting tenets. Women took a large share in the raging controversies, which, like most religious disputes, terminated in persecutions; and Christians, no longer dreading a Nero or a Domitian, now openly crucified and burnt each other. The naked bodies of matrons and noble maidens were, by means of pulleys, hoisted into the air, with a weight attached to their feet; and in this ignominious and agonizing posture, their tender flesh was torn with red-hot pincers, lashed with scourges, and coated with plates of burning iron. Christian contending with Christian, washed the broad streets of Rome and Constantinople with Christian blood;

and in a sectarian riot at Alexandria, ferocity ran so high, that the victors, after perpetrating the most savage butchery, positively devoured the mangled bodies of the slain. What a terrible realization of that warning prophecy—"I have not come to give peace, but a sword!"

Among the many victims of these unhappy tumults was Hypatia, a maiden not more distinguished for her beauty than for her learning and her virtues. Her father was Theon, the illustrious mathematician, and he had early initiated his gifted daughter in all the mysteries of philosophy. The classic groves of Athens and the schools of Alexandria equally applauded her attainments, and listened to the pure wisdom and the music of her lips. She respectfully declined the tender attentions of lovers; but, raised to the chair of Gamaliel, suffered youth and age, without preference or favour, to sit indiscriminately at her feet. Her fame and increasing popularity ultimately excited the jealousy of St. Cyril, at that time Bishop of Alexandria, and her friendship for his antagonist Orestes, the prefect of the city,

entailed on her devoted head the crushing weight of his enmity. In her way through the city, her chariot was surrounded by his creatures, headed by a crafty and savage fanatic named Peter the Reader; and the young and innocent woman was dragged to the ground, stripped of her garments, paraded naked through the streets, and torn limb from limb on the desecrated steps of the cathedral. The still warm flesh was scraped from her bones by oyster-shells, and the bleeding fragments thrown into a furnace, so that not an atom of the beautiful virgin should escape destruction.

St. Chrysostom provoked equal hostility by his eloquent denunciations of the vices of the clergy, and their treacherous subjugation of the consciences and the too confiding hearts of their spiritual daughters. The dames and maidens of Constantinople were divided into two contending factions by his potent sermons, the one almost worshipping, the other bitterly detesting, their venerable Bishop. His enemies ranged themselves under the odious banner of the Empress Eudoxia, whom he had impru-

dently stigmatized in the pulpit by the name of Jezebel, and their ranks included Marsa, Castricia, and Eugraphia, three patrician widows, infuriated by his bold exposures of fashionable depravity, and enabled by their wealth to extend the ramifications and sustain the fierce energies of their party. The fair and saintly Olympias animated the hopes of his adherents, and afforded, in her pure and blameless life, a bright example of his doctrine. His own incomparable eloquence continually fired the populace, and when, by a scandalous abuse of power, Eudoxia procured from the weak Arcadius his deposition and exile, a devoted flock rose in defence of their shepherd, defeated and butchered the imperial guards, and exacted his instant recall. But the triumph of the virtuous Bishop was of short duration ; and Eudoxia, introducing into the city a host of barbarians, who terrified the people with the double infliction of sword and fire, succeeded in effecting his banishment and his ruin.

As the upper classes of society, and the religious bodies, were given up to

contention, and lost to virtue, it could hardly be expected that we should find a high standard of morality in humbler life. Many causes combined, indeed, to vitiate and debase the lower orders, who, moreover, had before them the evil lives of the opulent, and were constantly tempted to follow their example. This was a matter, however, of which the state took so little cognizance, that the very revenue was levied in such a manner as to fall with crushing weight on the poor; and the tax called *gold of affliction* was frequently paid by working men, with the price of the bartered honour of their daughters.

Yet women of the lowest class were sometimes raised to the dignity of the imperial diadem. The famous Theodora, wife of Justinian, was the daughter of Acacius, a native of Cyprus, who, during the paternal reign of Anastasius, was master of the bears, kept for exhibition and slaughter at the public games. The death of Acacius left her mother a widow, when Theodora could not have been more than five years old, and at that age, she sat with her two sisters in

the circus, as a suppliant to the green faction, to which their father had belonged, and which they hoped to interest in their favour. But the dead and the poor have few friends, and the little orphans received no countenance from the greens, though the blues were considerate and indulgent; and this circumstance, at the time appearing so unimportant, was, in later years, the cause of many a fierce and bloody fray. As she grew up, Theodora, with her elder sister Comita, afterwards the mother of the Empress Sophia, earned a precarious livelihood on the stage, where her dawning charms soon attracted notice, commanded popular favour, and gradually involved her in the most frightful excesses. Yet the black soul of Theodora was clothed with a form which, by its wondrous symmetry and grace, might have denoted an angel of light. Small, but not diminutive, in stature, the exquisite proportion and delicate outline of her figure gave her an appearance of height; and its lightness, its pliancy, its beautiful aptitude of posture and motion, had more of an ethereal than mortal character. Her

complexion was pure and dazzling; and she possessed the rare power of throwing into her face all the varied emotions of the mind, giving it an animation and spirituality perfectly enchanting. Eyes soft and full, now bathing in their own light, now flashing with eager fire, charmed every beholder; and the virtuous Roman—for such a character was still in existence—carefully shunned the street where she lodged, lest her basilisk glance should lure him to destruction.

With such high personal qualifications for the tragic branch of the profession, Theodora devoted herself to comedy; and her success, as soon as she appeared in a prominent character, was so decided, that it furnishes indisputable warrant for her choice. This Jordan of ancient days had but to raise her eyes, to curl her cherry lip, to call up a gesture or mirthful look to her bewitching face, and the whole theatre, spectators and actors, burst into an uncontrollable roar, and she covered the absence of even the most ordinary accomplishments, by the simple display of her rich natural gifts. Her

infamous life at length drove her from the capital, in company with the prefect Ecebolus, from whom, however, whether by accident or design, she became separated in Egypt, where she was reduced to the greatest misery, if not actual want. But, in the midst of her distress, a strange, unaccountable notion had taken possession of her mind, that she was destined to become the wife of a monarch; and, impelled by this idea, she once more turned her drooping eyes towards Constantinople, the scene of her former triumphs and degradation. History is not silent as to the means by which she was enabled to prosecute her journey, and which made the name of Theodora a by-word and reproach in every city of the East. The metropolis was reached, at last; and here, avoiding her ancient associates, she sought, for a time, to obtain a livelihood by the labour of her hands, as a carder of wool, in which she succeeded till, in a fortunate hour, she attracted the attention of Justinian, when that acquaintance was commenced which led to her marriage with an Emperor. In her honour the traditionary

laws of the empire were abrogated, and she was solemnly recognised as the partner and colleague of Justinian, who declared that he received such a wife as the special gift of God.

But Theodora, raised to this giddy height, felt the ignominy of her early career, and, now that she was invested with the insignia of royalty, seldom presented herself in that magnificent city where she was so well remembered in another position. Yet no one dared to recall that too recent period, even by the faintest whisper; and doomed indeed was the tongue that, in an unguarded moment, was betrayed into such a treason. Alert spies caught up his accents, and quickly reported them to the enraged Empress, who, in executing her vengeance, stimulated the ready zeal of her myrmidon with these significant words—"If my orders are not fully obeyed, I swear by Him who liveth for ever, that your skin shall be flayed from your body."

Her stately palace on the sunny shore of the Bosphorus, reared its massive walls, crowned with cupolas and towers, over a

labyrinth of dungeons, unknown to the functionaries of the empire, and accessible only to the guilty instruments of her will. Here, in some reeking vault, dimly lit by the flare of a torch, Theodora adjudged her victims to the rack, the scourge, or a secret death ; and, forgetting every sentiment of her sex, calmly witnessed the execution of her commands. Then she ascended to the broad light of day, streaming through regal halls and gilded saloons, where art and untold wealth exhausted their treasures to secure her ease, or minister to her luxury ; and a thousand slaves, in watchful and incessant attendance, flew to obey her capricious behests.

Fiction could invent no incident so strange as this evil woman, in the plenitude of earthly power, sitting on the imperial throne in the Hippodrome, where, in her childhood, she had appeared as a suppliant and beggar, to receive the homage of the Vandal King Gelimer, the captive of Belisarius. A glorious cortege led the way through the spacious area of the circus, and the barbarian monarch was blinded by the dazzling pomp

and pageantry that surrounded the Empress of the East. The proud descendant of Genseric, who had made a spoil of imperial Rome, bent his knee before the crowned Magdalen, and the illustrious Belisarius stooped to kiss the embroidered hem of her garment. Myriads of spectators acclaimed her name ; and saw, in the disgraceful spectacle, which attested their ruin and debasement, a resuscitation of the proud glories of purer times.

The crown which Justinian shared with Theodora, was preserved to him by her wisdom and decision. Influenced by her partiality, he had adopted the colour and the cause of the blue faction, in opposition to the green, which, besides suspecting it of a secret attachment to the descendants of the Emperor Anastasius, she still regarded with the bitter hatred of early years. Imperial favour intoxicated the blues, already impatient of the most necessary restraints of the law ; and Constantinople was kept in continual turmoil by the violence of these Christian janissaries. Proceeding from one outrage to another, they finally broke into

the houses of the greens, carried off their wives and daughters, including many of patrician rank, and committed horrors not to be described. By an unaccountable impulse, both factions then united in an attempt to subvert the government; and after five days of murder, rapine, and anarchy, Hypatius, the nephew of Anastasius, was dragged from his house, and, regardless of his own entreaties, and the tears of his terrified wife, invested with the sovereign purple. The feeble and timid Justinian, instead of endeavouring to suppress the revolt, instantly prepared for flight, when he was diverted from his purpose by the courage of Theodora, who entering the council-chamber, vehemently declared that she would never quit the palace. "Death," she continued, "is the condition of our birth, but they who have reigned, should never survive the loss of dignity and dominion. I pray Heaven that I may never be seen without my diadem and purple: that I may no longer behold the light, when I cease to be saluted by the name of Queen. If you resolve, O, Cæsar! to fly, you have treasures:

behold the sea, you have ships: but tremble lest the desire of life should expose you to a wretched exile and an ignominious death. For my own part, I adhere to the maxim of antiquity, that the throne is a glorious sepulchre." Such heroic words from the mouth of a woman imparted a transient resolution to Justinian; and shamed, if they did not embolden, his distracted council. Three thousand veterans were hastily assembled, and despatched in two bodies, under the respective orders of Belisarius and Mundus, to engage the rebels. They made their way with difficulty through the burning city, over heaps of embers, and between falling and blazing houses, to the Hippodrome, where the rioters had congregated, and, entering by two opposite gates, fell on the surprised greens, while the blues, at sight of the banner of Justinian, returned to their allegiance, and joined in the slaughter of their late accomplices.

The foulest blot that rests on the memory of Theodora is the murder of her son, the child of an unknown sire, who, at his death, when Theodora was the sovereign mistress

of Asia, revealed to his unhappy offspring the secret of his parentage. Eager to push his fortune, the youth flew to Constantinople, as soon as the remains of his father were laid in the grave, and presented himself in the magnificent palace of his mother. There he, too, found a grave, whether in the dungeons beneath its floor, or the placid Bosphorus in its front, no human eye has been able to search out: but from the moment he entered the boudoir of Theodora, the child of shame disappeared for ever.

Theodora, in spite of fate and waning charms, maintained her ascendancy over Justinian to the last; and after she had been twenty-four years his wife, he bewailed her death as sincerely and as poignantly as if he had lost a blooming bride—the highest tribute, perhaps, that can be rendered to her unequalled powers of fascination and deception.

At the same time that the Emperor was wedded to this Cyprian, his greatest and most illustrious subject espoused a woman of similar origin, the equal of Theodora in in-

famy, and occasionally the confidante of her intrigues, and the accomplice of her crimes. Antonina, as the lady was named, was the wife of Belisarius, who, in the greatness of his exploits, of his character, and of his sense of duty, was the Wellington of the East. Like Theodora, she had been cradled in the circus, and was the daughter of an ignoble woman, whose ostensible husband was a charioteer. Thus frailty was the heritage, as well as the name of Antonina, and remained through life her leading characteristic. After running the gauntlet of the stage, she entered the bondage of matrimony, and was a buxom widow, with a sturdy and gallant son, when, at a ripe age, she accepted the suit of Belisarius. But years could not tame the unbridled temperament of a woman to whom vice had been as sustenance and nurture ; and in a short time, Belisarius was the only person in Constantinople who was ignorant of his wife's excesses. Confiding husbands, however, if they have no perception themselves, rarely lack an Iago to unseal their eyes ; and Belisarius was informed by Antonina's tire-woman of

her flagitious courses, and the dishonour she had brought on his name. Two credible associates confirmed her disclosures, under a sworn promise of protection ; but the anger of the infatuated hero, which appeared to be uncontrollable, vanished before the ready tears of Antonina, and to prove his belief in her innocence, he surrendered to her vengeance the three witnesses to her guilt. The tongues that had divulged such fatal secrets were then plucked from their roots ; and the yet warm bodies of the imprudent tattlers were cut into morsels, and scattered on the sea. Antonina, meanwhile, rendered bolder by impunity, no longer submitted to the least restraint ; and her attentions to Theodosius, a handsome barbarian, whom Belisarius had received into his house, were so undisguised, and so openly paraded, that they became the jest of the whole army. Photius, her son, maddened by such a disgrace, rushed into the presence of Belisarius, and with indignant tears, demanded justice on his mother. He adduced incontestable evidence in support of his allegations ; and the jealousy of the doating husband was aroused,

at last, by the culprit's son. But the conscience-stricken Theodosius had already become alarmed, and flying from the camp, found safety and concealment in an obscure monastery under the cowl of a monk; Belisarius was again convinced and again deceived by the vehement protestations of his wife; and the chivalrous Photius was condemned for his indiscretion to the welcome seclusion of exile.

But in his own ruin, the son, though he might forgive the cruelty, could not forget the degradation of his mother, and he contrived to discover and seize Theodosius, who, after being recalled by Belisarius, and acquiring immense treasures through the influence of Antonina, had, in a moment of remorseful despondency, taken refuge with his spoil in the sanctuary of St. John. The faithless monk was now carried off to Cilicia, and immured in the dungeon of a sequestered castle; but the active emissaries of the Empress Theodora, whose aid Antonina had invoked, soon traced out his prison, effected his liberation, and made a captive of Photius. While the latter was groaning in one of the

gloomy cells, dug, like graves, beneath the palace of Theodora, his mother and her imperial protectress were revelling overhead, amidst all the accessories of Asiatic luxury ; and the ungrateful and impious Theodosius, who had forgotten both his obligations to his benefactor and his vows to Heaven, was treated with the honours awarded to a sovereign prince. But, in a moment, death snatched him for ever from the scene of his wicked triumphs, leaving the bereaved Antonina inconsolable and desperate. Her sorrow and rage were wreaked on her innocent son, who was dragged from his dungeon, where light never entered, to be lashed by the scourge, or pitilessly stretched on the rack. Twice he found means to make his escape, and sought the fragile protection of a sanctuary ; but neither the privileges of the altar, nor the indignant outcries of the populace, drawn to the spot by the appearance of the military, could preserve an honourable citizen from the despotic power of the Empress, and the hatred of an unnatural parent. Not till after a captivity of three years did Photius finally escape, and making

his way to Jerusalem, obtained repose, though not liberty, in the narrow cell of a monk.

The assistance and support which Antonina received from Theodora were purchased by services equally unscrupulous. To meet the wishes of her royal mistress, Antonina was willing to sacrifice every principle, or engage in any enterprise; and during the occupation of Rome by Belisarius, she even went to the length of deposing the Pope, who, by his adhesion to the tenets of the Council of Chalcedon, had incurred the fatal displeasure of Theodora. The pontiff had been detected corresponding with the Gothic army, then besieging the city; and, summoned before the Roman General to answer the charge, the evidence of his messengers, and the more conclusive testimony of an intercepted letter, signed by his own hand, insured his conviction. His sentence, justified by the laws of war, was pronounced by the lips of Antonina, as she reclined on a luxurious couch; and the venerable Sylvester was deprived of the keys of Heaven and earth, muffled in the ghostly cowl of a friar,

and smuggled off, a prisoner and exile, to a solitary and dreary monastery in the heart of Asia. An enormous bribe secured the vacant tiara for a more obsequious priest ; and the Empress gratefully divided the spoil with her dutiful Antonina.

During the Persian war, Belisarius was induced by a rumour of the death of Justinian to join in the movement of Buzes, which excited the highest resentment of Theodora ; and the hero was recalled to Constantinople with every mark of disgrace. But the enraged Empress, in the heat of her fury, shrank from taking his life, so often risked in the support and defence of her throne ; and she contented herself with despoiling him of his treasures, and leaving him a pensioner on the bounty of his wife. “ You cannot be ignorant,” she observed, with a frown, as she informed him of his fate, “ how much you have deserved my displeasure ; but I am not insensible of the services of Antonina. To her merits and intercession I have granted your life. Let your gratitude be displayed where it is due, not in words, but in your future behaviour.” After

the death of Theodora, Antonina, in a fit of compunction or fear, retired to a monastery, on which she had expended the shattered remains of her fortune; and Belisarius is said to have had his eyes put out by Justinian, and to have wandered in rags through the streets of Constantinople, earnestly beseeching the passers-by to "Give a penny to Belisarius the General." But this story, though not too marvellous to be true, since it might find more than one parallel in the history of human vicissitudes, is doubted by Gibbon, and appears to rest on no credible testimony, whence we may conclude that Belisarius was not so unfortunate as Justinian was reputed ungrateful.

Intercourse with Eastern courts attracted to Rome and Constantinople droves of those human mules, whom Asiatic jealousy has selected, from the days of Semiramis, as the special guards of woman, and whose cloven feet were accustomed to preserve a footing on the slippery pavement of palaces. Infamy was the badge of all the tribe. Yet they soon occupied every approach to power and every avenue to the throne; their

sinister influence was felt in every department of the government; and the noblest senators and proudest warriors, forgetting the dignity of birth and merit, were not ashamed to purchase their advancement from a rapacious chamberlain. Narses, reared in the stern honesty of the camp, was an exception to the rule, and, indeed, owed his physical degradation to accident. But the reproach of the class became a stigma on the warrior, which all his glorious achievements were unable to efface. "Leave to men," was the message of the Empress Sophia, "the exercise of arms, and return to your proper station among the maidens of the palace, where a distaff shall again be placed in your hands." "I will spin her such a thread," replied the indignant chief, "as she shall not easily unravel." But a life worn by toil and a century of years was now near its close; and death rudely intercepted the just revenge of the hero, while his name was being acclaimed from the steps of the Capitol.

Too often, indeed, was the imperial throne overturned by successful soldiers, and the very foundations of society convulsed and

subverted. The deposition and murder of the pious Maurice and his sons was followed by the imprisonment of his widow, the Empress Constantina, and her three youthful daughters, who, under a pretence of providing them an asylum, were confined in the cells of a secluded convent. But in this living grave, Constantina was haunted by an incessant terror of the assassin's poniard, and she took advantage of a dark night to escape to the sanctuary of St. Sophia, where she would doubtless have fallen a victim to the rage of the usurper, Phocas, if the resolute attitude of the Patriarch had not averted the blow. A second attempt at flight afforded a specious pretext for taking her life; and after being subjected to the torments and the ignominy of the rack, the Empress and her three daughters were barbarously condemned to the block, and all perished on the same scaffold.

The death of the infamous Copronymus, son of Leo III., once more placed the imperial sceptre in the firm hand of a woman—for the feeble partnership of Leo IV. was scarcely recognised by his wife Irene. This

“maid of Athens” possessed no recommendation but her rare beauty, when, at the age of seventeen, she was selected by Copronymus as the spouse of Leo; but when the death of the Emperor raised her husband to power, her great capacity proved fully equal to the duties and difficulties of government. The premature death of Leo left her the uncontrolled exercise of authority, and the guardianship of an infant son; and now it was that the ambition of the Empress ignored the affection of the parent. In order to incapacitate her child for the functions of sovereignty, she deliberately neglected his education, and permitted him to grow up in idleness and ignorance, though, by her command, he was early initiated in the wicked mysteries of vice, and due care was taken that his boyish excesses should not be concealed from the people. Still, Constantine—for so he was named—became the hope of a faction, yearning to seize the uneasy helm of the State; and he was induced to sanction a design for the deposition of his mother, and his own elevation to supreme power. The intrigue, however,

was seasonably discovered by Irene, who frustrated its operation, seized and severely punished the conspirators, and subjected the rebellious Emperor to the awful chastisement of the rod. An *émeute* of the Armenian guard ultimately accomplished his deliverance and his ruin. After banishing his mother, Constantine took sullen possession of the throne, but retained around him the treacherous eunuchs of Irene. A clandestine correspondence was opened with the fallen Empress; and her misguided son too late discovered his danger, and sought safety in an ignominious flight. He was arrested on the opposite shore of the Bosphorus as he alighted from his galley, and quickly surrounded by the partisans of his mother, who, regardless of his commands, and his more earnest and moving entreaties, dragged him back to Constantinople, and immured him in a lonely chamber, in the heart of the palace. It was in this very apartment that the unfortunate Constantine had first beheld the light; and here, in the gloom and silence of midnight, the cruel myrmidons of Irene stealthily approached his couch,

plunged their daggers into his eyes, and doomed him to eternal darkness. Irene was again Empress; but her triumph was purchased by the violation of the tenderest claims of nature, as well as the first dictates of religion; and her restoration was proclaimed amidst the suppressed execrations of the populace. In that ignorant and credulous age, Heaven itself was supposed to mark its anger at her crime, by a total eclipse of the sun, which for seventeen days withheld its light from the affrighted world; and five years of wise and successful government failed to retrieve her reputation. Her rule was terminated by a cabal of eunuchs, and the mistress of the Roman world was, in her last years, compelled to earn a scanty subsistence by the labour of her hands.

The career of the Empress Theodora, consort of the stern and implacable Theophilus, was, in some respects, not dissimilar to that of Irene, though, under corresponding circumstances, her prudence or her virtues preserved her from similar guilt. Theophilus selected his Queen in a manner more becoming a barbarous than a civilized

monarch, but which, notwithstanding, had the advantage of affording a wide latitude of choice. Assembling all the most beautiful maidens in the empire, he ranged them in a double line in the principal saloon of his palace; and attired in the imperial robes, with the purple mantle drooping from his shoulders, passed in state through the open ranks of the lovely company, holding in his hand a golden apple, destined as the prize of the victress. Amidst such a throng, even an Emperor might feel embarrassed, and the bewildered Theophilus wavered between the beauty of Theodora and the dazzling charms of Icasia. "Woman," he observed, glancing at the latter, "has done much evil in the world." "And surely, sire," answered Icasia, "she has likewise been the instrument of much good." The monarch was offended at the retort, and gave the apple and his hand to the silent Theodora.

Theodora was left, like Irene, the guardian of her son, when he had only attained his fifth year, and she administered the government for a considerable period with consummate ability and judgment. Her care, how-

ever, could not preserve the heir of Theophilus from the corrupting vermin of the palace; and the young Emperor was an adept in sin, while he was yet a child in years. On reaching the age of eighteen, he aspired to govern alone; and after a faint resistance, Theodora abdicated the reins of power, and withdrew, in sullen majesty, from an ungrateful court. All restraint was now removed from the inhuman Michael, and, in his flagitious reign, he surpassed the vices, without displaying the graces of Nero, and was finally stabbed in his bed by Basil, his favourite chamberlain, whom he had raised from the royal stable to be his assassin and successor:

Constantine IX. was the last male descendant of Basil, and in his declining years he looked with apprehension to the future of his three daughters, whose maiden hands were, in so troublous a period, when the empire was threatened by the advancing host of the Saracens, but ill adapted to sustain a reeling throne. In this dilemma they were invited to embrace the yoke and honourable protection of matrimony; but

Eudocia, the eldest of the sisters, had already devoted herself to a monastic life, Theodora shrank from the hymeneal altar; and only Zoe, the youngest, at the prudent age of forty-eight, could be prevailed upon to accept the incumbrance of a husband. Her choice fell on a married man, Romanus Argyrus, but he refused, when unexpectedly apprised of his election, to abandon a spouse whom he tenderly loved for the hand of a presumptive Empress; and it was not till his wife abdicated her place, and buried herself in the cell of a convent, that a threat of putting out his eyes wrung from Romanus a reluctant compliance. The death of Constantine raised him to the throne, but the affections of the Empress were already transferred to his chamberlain, Michael, and the faithless Zoe presented, with a smile, a draught of poison to her husband. Michael, if he did not abet, connived at her treason, and while the corpse of Romanus was yet scarcely cold, he was solemnly united to the murderess and admitted to share the degraded diadem. But remorse, the stern avenger, which enters the gates of palaces

as easily as the open door of a hovel, haunted and distracted the guilty Michael; and surrounded by the ensigns of power, he could see nothing but the frowning spectre of Romanus. He sought to atone for his crime by fasts and vigils, and left his wife and miserable subjects to the domination of his brother John, one of the tribe of eunuchs, who, himself excluded from the succession, induced Zoe, in a fatal moment, to adopt as her heir his nephew Michael, the son of another brother, and, at length, to invest the unknown youth with the supreme authority. Michael's first act was to insult and imprison his benefactress, and he would probably have proceeded to take her life, if a popular tumult, provoked by his tyranny, had not rescued her from his hands, at the same time hurling him from the throne, and punishing his ingratitude with the loss of his eyes. Sixty years had not cooled the ardour of Zoe, and at the entreaty of her subjects, she willingly espoused a third husband, and consented to share his affections with a previous claimant, who, while Zoe was saluted as Empress, received the inferior title of

Augusta. On the death of her husband, Constantine X., who survived the unhappy Empress, the crown devolved on Theodora, but her reign was merely nominal, and she not unwillingly resigned the cares of royalty for the gloomy repose of the grave. Her death paved the way, after a short interval, for the accession, by a military and popular revolt, of the august house of the Comneni.

The illustrious Anna Comnena, a scholar and an author, has bequeathed us, in her history of the reign of her father, the Emperor Alexius, a literary memorial of the virtues of her race. It is naturally coloured by the affectionate partiality of a daughter, and, perhaps, of a partisan—for Anna was herself involved in the events she describes; but, notwithstanding the opposing testimony of the Latin writers, we may safely conclude that the tribute she pays to the character of her parent was not wholly unmerited. That Alexius was prone to dissimulation, however, is proved by incontestable evidence, voluntarily though unthinkingly tendered, under circumstances which give it peculiar

force. His consort Irene was desirous of securing the succession to Anna, instead of leaving it to the male line; and in his last moments, she besieged his pillow with this unnatural request. The dying Emperor may be forgiven that, as his eyes were about to close for ever, on the illusive grandeur of earthly power, he replied by an evasive observation on the vanity of human wishes, eliciting from Irene the severe retort—“You die, as you have lived, a hypocrite!”

But though Alexius withheld his sanction from her pretensions, Anna, supported by the injudicious preference of Irene, did not tamely submit to the loss of the crown, and she was forming a powerful conspiracy against her brother, John the Handsome, when her design was discovered and betrayed by her timid husband. Her disappointment at the result was only equalled by her indignation against the traitor. “Nature,” she bitterly cried, “has made a mistake, and given me the soul of a man, and that of a woman to Bryennius.” The Emperor spared her life, which the voice of nature, if not of pity, forbade him to de-

stroy ; but he seized her palace and domains, and instantly bestowed them on a favourite Turkish courtier. The Turk, eclipsing the generosity of the Christian, respectfully declined the gift, and begged that it might be restored to the destitute princess. His request was granted, and Anna thus secured an honourable and dignified retreat.

Anna witnessed the arrival in the East of the first Crusaders, whom Peter the Hermit, by his eloquence and fanaticism, summoned from every nook of Europe to fight under the banner of the Cross, and whom the effeminate citizens of Constantinople politely saluted with the epithet of barbarians. But these dubious allies of the empire opposed but a feeble check to the new and invincible power, which, rising in the deserts of Arabia, now broke in headlong waves over the whole face of Asia. Mahomet, or Mohammed, the originator of this mighty movement, exercised too great an influence on the destinies of the world, and especially of woman, not to find a place in our narrative ; but from the necessity of compression, we can but glance at his

character, and faintly reflect his strange and marvellous history.

Mohammed was a native of the city of Mecca, in Arabia, and a scion of the illustrious race of Hashem, of the tribe of Koreish. His father bore the name of Abdallah, and was so distinguished for his personal beauty, that his marriage with Amina, the mother of the prophet, broke the gentle hearts of two hundred maidens, who simultaneously expired on the nuptial day. His son inherited the fatal gift, and at the age of twenty-five, made a conquest of his mistress, the rich and noble Cadijah, who bestowed her hand on her engaging domestic. Mohammed was now, by the ample fortune of his wife, restored to the rank and position of his ancestors, of which he had been deprived, on the premature death of his father while he was yet a child, by the unscrupulous frauds of his nearest kindred; but, though raised to independence, he continued to devote himself to the pursuits of commerce, and it was not till his fortieth year that, abandoning this modest vocation, he for-

mally announced himself as the messenger and prophet of God.

Brought up in the precincts, and almost under the roof of the Caaba, or temple of Mecca, which was entrusted to the guardianship of his family, the mind of Mohammed, naturally grave, had early been imbued with religious feeling, and inclined to religious contemplation. Travel, observation, and a free intercourse with foreigners, particularly with the Jews and various Christian sects of Syria, materially enlarged his ideas; and as he advanced in age, he began to recoil from the gròtesque or hideous idols enshrined in the Caaba, and to look for some purer object of adoration and worship. Every year, during the month of Ramadan, he flew from Mecca and the eyes of society; and for thirty days entombed himself in the gloomy cave of Hera, with no companion but his thoughts. Meditation is the mother of delusions, as well as the most genuine source of inspiration. In the cave of Hera, Mohammed entered the darker cavern of his own mind; he looked round with the torch of enthusiasm, and thought it was the light-

ning of God. His rapt imagination, fascinated by beatific visions—by the spell of one unchanging, overpowering idea, was raised to the seventh Heaven, brought before the Divine Throne, instructed to enlighten and reclaim mankind, and received a new but spurious Gospel in those delusive words—“There is but one God, and Mohammed is His prophet.”

The first convert to the new faith was the loving Cadijah, who, having already given Mohammed her heart, could not deny him her soul. Zeid, his slave, his cousin Ali, and the wealthy Abukeker, were the next acquisitions of the prophet; and three tedious years were devoted to the conversion of fourteen persons. Surrounded by this band, Mohammed, amidst the convivial fellowship of a banquet, divulged his mission to the principal sheiks of the race of Hashem. “Who among you,” he then asked, “will be my companion and vizier?” A profound silence seized the astonished assembly, till Ali, a youth of fourteen, impatiently exclaimed, “I, O prophet! am the man; and whosoever rises against you, I will dash out

his teeth, tear out his eyes, break his legs, rip up his belly. O, prophet! I will be thy vizier." The sturdy youth was instantly named to the office, and fully did he redeem his savage promise.

But the doctrines of Mohammed, striking at the very heart of the ancient religion, made but little progress in Mecca, while they arrayed against him every votary of superstition, and every enemy of change. The accession of Abu Sophian to the government of Mecca gave strength and boldness to his enemies, and it was determined that a man from every tribe should be deputed to take his life, so as to preclude his family, when the tragic event should become known, from demanding reparation for the murder. An angel—or a woman—warned Mohammed of his danger, and he owed his escape from death to a timely flight. But the assassins were soon on his track, and he was obliged to take refuge in the cave of Thor, a few miles from the city, where in company with the faithful Abukeker, one of his earliest converts, he remained in momentary expectation of discovery. Once

they heard the voices of their baffled pursuers at the mouth of the cavern. "We are only two," whispered Abukeker. "There is a third," answered Mohammed: "it is God." Their escape was indeed miraculous; and a spider's web across the opening of the cave, inducing a supposition that no one could have recently entered, preserved the seer from the daggers of his enemies. Under the friendly protection of night he abandoned his covert, and with difficulty made his way to Medina—an incident commemorated by the Mahommedan era of the Hegira, or flight, the basis of Asiatic chronology.

Mohammed was received at Medina with shouts of triumph. Five hundred citizens, arrayed in their best attire, presented themselves as his escort; and the people saluted him as their sovereign, while they revered him as a Prophet. "If we are slain in your service," asked a band of Sheiks, "what will be our reward?" "Paradise," was the prompt reply; and that promise, so liberally given, without condition or reservation, surrounded him with armed legions, and finally

established his spiritual sway from the Indus to the Nile.

The Paradise of Mohammed was expressly adapted to the cravings of an Eastern imagination. On the wide plains and in the arid deserts of Asia, even within the walls of its cities, water is the first necessary and luxury of life ; and the Mohammedan Heaven presents to the faithful a pleasant picture of crystal fountains, throwing up their waters in cool recesses, overshadowed by verdant trees. Here every dutiful son of the Prophet is surrounded by seventy-two wives, all graceful as fairies, and possessing, among other incomparable charms, black eyes of the most bewitching description. Women are not excluded from this tangible Elysium, but the joys they are to inherit, unlike those of men, are veiled by a wise silence.

Four wives are allotted by the Koran as the earthly portion of a believer ; but a special revelation from Heaven, which was never lacking in an emergency, gave an unlimited number to Mohammed ; and the capacious heart of the Prophet afforded

ample room for eleven consorts. These mortal houris inhabited separate dwellings, clustered round the humble abode of Mohammed like grapes on a vine; and lived, like himself, with the greatest simplicity, on dates, barley-bread, and honey. It is singular that they were all widows, with the solitary exception of Ayesha, his favourite, who—so early does woman attain maturity under an Arabian sun—was but nine years old when she became his bride. Possessing the advantages of personal beauty and a persuasive tongue, in addition to his religious and military reputation, Mohammed rarely sued in vain; yet Hlad, the daughter of Omeya, a young and beautiful widow, was, at first, opposed to his addresses. “Alas, prophet of God!” she cried, “how can you expect happiness with me? I am no longer young: I have a son; and I am naturally prone to jealousy.” “As to your age,” replied Mohammed, “thou art much younger than I: as to thy son, he will find in me a father: as to thy jealousy, I will pray to Allah to pluck it from thy heart.” Such logic was irresist-

ible, and the fair Head gave a blushing consent.

The later domestic career of Mohammed affords a striking contrast to that of his earlier life, when, for twenty-four years, he remained constant in his nonourable attachment to Cadijah, admitting no other spouse to his house till she had ceased to exist. To the last, she retained a tender place in his memory, and his continual reference to her amiable qualities, as an example of female excellence, excited the ire, if not the jealousy, of the blooming Ayesha. “You forget she was aged!” observed the offended beauty. “God has now given you a better wife.” “By Allah, no!” returned Mahomed, with noble emotion: “a better there could not be! When I was poor, she made me rich; and when I was mocked and derided, she believed in me.”

Ayesha had no reason to complain of Mohammed's affection for the dead, since she might be well assured, from the marked preference he always showed for her, that she need fear no rival among the living. Her very follies invoked his tenderness, or

claimed his protection; and when her indiscreet conduct gave rise to a serious charge, for which there appears to have been but too good grounds, he resorted to his ordinary device of a divine revelation to clear her aspersed character. She maintained her ascendancy over him for the remainder of his days, and on her lap his head reclined at the sad hour of death.

After she became a widow, Ayesha, in her bitter enmity to Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, joined the malignant faction of Telha and Zobeir, who, on the assassination of Othman, the third successor of the Prophet in the Caliphate of the faithful, unfurled the standard of revolt. At the memorable battle of Bussora, which ended in the total destruction of the rebels, she was present in a litter in the midst of the fight; but though the vehicle was completely riddled by javelins, and seventy men who successively held her camel were killed or disabled, she escaped unhurt. The victor treated her with lenity and indulgence, and she was conveyed from the field by a guard of women, attired as soldiers, who finally escorted

her to the holy city of Medina, where, precluded from contracting a second marriage, she passed the remnant of her life as a mourner at the sacred tomb of Mohammed.

Next to Ayesha, one of the most celebrated women of the Mahommedan *régime* was Zobeida, consort of the Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid, the contemporary and friend of Charlemagne. This lovely princess was endowed with all the attractions which fascinate and enchain the Asiatic mind. A complexion fair as morning was lit up by eyes black, soft, and lustrous; and dark silk tresses waved, like the shadows of a summer night, from her pure and dazzling forehead. The gentle disposition of Zobeida, which no circumstance ever ruffled, gave additional force to her charms; and before she raised the jealous gossamer of her veil, man's susceptible heart was vanquished by the sweetness of her voice. Her influence was always exercised in the cause of humanity, in the interest of the poor, the weak, and the innocent; and many a romantic tale celebrates her beauty, and gratefully commends her clemency and tender-

ness. She reigned without a rival in the noble heart of Haroun; and a stately edifice at Tabreez, rising to the height of eighty feet, and known by the appellation of Zobaida's Tower, remains to this day a memorial of the love and devotion she inspired in the Commander of the Faithful.

The Babylonian Caliphate was overthrown by Mahmid, Shah of Persia, aided by a tribe of Scythian origin, called the Turcomans, or Seljukian Turks. This new race of Mahommedans, after subduing and then losing the devastated provinces of Syria and Palestine, made their way into Greece; and at the commencement of the fourteenth century, the celebrated Osman, from whom the Turks derive their popular appellation of Osmanlis, laid at Neapolis, on the ruins of a Roman city, the slender and precarious foundations of the present Turkish empire.

The life of Ottoman women is still regulated by the Koran, which, with the collected precepts of Mohammed, precisely defines their position in society, or rather in the family of their husbands, their domestic relations, and their conjugal duties. These,

however, are of the narrowest limits, particularly among the upper classes; and a Turkish lady passes her days in smoking tobacco, listening to extravagant stories, applauding the agile movements of hired dancing-girls, or embroidering slippers. Her life is consumed by idleness, languor, and ennui; her mind is harassed by the petty rivalries and miserable intrigues of a distracted household; and she knows no world beyond the little sphere of the harem. Privacy she is never permitted, even if she could wish to seek the companionship of a vacant and weary mind; and servants, or rather slaves, in an attitude of homage, continually watch her looks, while she sits cross-legged on a sumptuous couch, the drapery of her flowing robe studiously and gracefully arranged, so as to suffer only her tiny feet to be seen.

The childhood of Turkish females is not subject to the harsh restrictions of later years, and young girls, wearing no veil but their own innocence, attend the same schools as boys, and have the range of their parental home, without being confined to the limits

of the harem. In some respects, the result almost justifies their subsequent seclusion, as neither in mind nor manners are they improved by an intercourse which, by law and custom, their mothers are prevented from sharing, and, consequently, cannot overlook. At the most impressionable age, they insensibly acquire a coarseness and levity, which they are never able entirely to discard; and the careless training of the child is but too apparent in the free demeanour of the mother.

Turkey scrupulously withholds from woman the rank, though not the dazzling splendours, of royalty. The mother of the reigning Sultan, indeed, enjoys the proud title of Sultana, but the ladies of the palace are merely styled Kaduns, and are not admitted to the dignity of marriage. Abdul Mesjid, the present sovereign of Turkey, has confided his domestic happiness to five Kaduns, who reside in the stately chambers of the Seraglio, and are sedulously attended by two thousand female slaves, the ministers of their will, their pleasures, and their caprice.

The broad plateaux of the Caucasus, which first afforded a home to the human race, are still the cradle and nursery of the mothers of Turkey. In the lap of those stupendous mountains, the Alps of the East, in the glens of Circassia and the smiling valleys of Georgia, Ottoman gold has found a market of beauty, where it may purchase its rarest specimens. My intrepid friend Captain Spencer, one of the few Europeans who has penetrated into the Caucasian fastnesses, declares that "the beauty of feature and symmetry of form for which the Circassian race are so celebrated, have not been exaggerated. The pure mountain air gives a freshness to their complexion not to be expected in such a latitude. That of the women is delicately clear, and as they estimate at its full value the charms of a pretty person, they leave no means untried to improve their beauty."

The Circassians exhibit many of the usages common to other Eastern nations, in respect to their treatment of women: young girls, as in Turkey, are under no restraint as to their associates, till they attain a cer-

tain age, generally nine or ten, but from that time they live exclusively with their own sex, and never appear among men without the protection of a veil. At their marriage, the bridegroom, or his parents, if he is still in dependence on them, present the father of the bride with a dower, varying in value with the social rank of the lady, or his own means and position. But the most beautiful Circassian women are bought up by Jews and Armenians, for the purpose of supplying the harems of Turkey, Egypt, and Persia, and, in fact, form the staple export of the country.

Such are the women of the dominant race in the once potent, but never free Byzantine territory. For four centuries the Mahomedan power, now appearing on one side, now on another, hung, like a dark thunder-cloud, over the shattered fabric of the empire, which retained the name, without the vitality of a nation. On the morning of the 29th May, 1453, the long-impending storm burst forth with irresistible might; and the imperial city of Constantinople, with its churches, its gorgeous palaces, and its mise-

rable inhabitants, fell, after a feeble resistance, into the hands of the Moslems. A crowd of helpless women fled for refuge to the cathedral of St. Sophia, as if a Christian temple, however venerable, could protect them from the violence and the cruelty of the Musselman. Too soon they were undeceived. The inexorable Sultan Mahomed rode on horseback into the cathedral, followed by a legion of ruffians: he galloped through the terrified suppliants to the steps of the altar; and there, amidst breathless silence, proclaimed the new and ascendant faith—"There is but one God, and Mahommed is his Prophet."

It was the watchword of destruction, and a terrible shriek announced that the fearful work had begun.

II.

BARBAROUS NATIONS.

THE condition of woman has always been the most degraded the nearer we approach to a state of nature, or, rather, the less we are raised above the level and mere animal characteristics of the brute creation. Among savage nations, she is still a hewer of wood and drawer of water, providing by her labour for the daily sustenance and support of her family, while man, abdicating his natural duties, lives in shameful indolence and ease. This inversion of nature has, as a matter of course, distorted and perverted her disposition: her heart has been literally unstrung, and, like a broken musical instrument, has

completely lost its harmony. It is true that, in some cases, the beautiful lineaments of the female character have remained apparent in the lowest depths of human debasement ; but the general effect of savage life is to steel her tender feelings, to pluck up her sympathies, to deaden her affections, and to destroy her modesty. She becomes a curse to man, instead of a blessing, for in this abject, irredeemable servitude, she serves but to develop, foster, and sustain his worst propensities.

We are warranted in concluding, from their extraordinary length of days, the incredible hardships they endured, and the wonderful duration of their beauty, that women in primeval times were endowed with physical powers surpassing very far those of modern experience ; and it was to be expected that, under such circumstances, they should make an attempt to throw off the yoke which man had imposed upon them. Probably some incident of this kind gave rise to the community of Amazons, or Amazonides, who for many ages preserved their independence as a female nation. Their

very name was significant of their desperate character, being derived from their inhuman custom of burning out the right breast, that they might, on reaching maturity, hurl a javelin with more force, and use more freedom in drawing the bow. They are alluded to by Priam, whom they assisted against the Greeks, although, as we learn from his own lips, he had previously been numbered among their enemies—

“ In Phrygia once were gallant armies known,
In ancient time, when Otaus filled the throne,
When godlike Mygdon led their troops of horse,
And I, to join them, raised the Trojan force :
Against the manlike Amazons we stood,
And Sangar’s stream ran purple with their blood.”

The fierce resolution, daring, and unconquerable intrepidity of the Amazons, were a proverb among the ancients, and they were held in dread by the greatest heroes and most powerful nations. Their partial subjugation formed the ninth labour of Hercules, and was afterwards assigned to Bellerophon, as a sure means of effecting his destruction. As the basis of their union, all association with men was strictly prohibited, except during a few days in the year, when, throw-

ing aside their warlike character, they visited the surrounding kingdoms, and were permitted, by special treaties, to depart unmolested. According to Justin, they barbarously strangled their sons, as soon as they came into the world, but Diodorus affirms that they merely distorted their limbs, and others assert, with more probability, that they offered the despised infants no violence, but courteously handed them over to their fathers. The fortunate daughter of an Amazon was reserved for a higher and more ambitious destiny. From her infancy she was inured to every kind of hardship, and after submitting to the cruel initial rite, was carefully trained in the use of the bow and spear, the javelin and deadly sling, as soon as she could move her arms. At an early age she took the field, and encountered in mortal combat the most formidable legions of antiquity.

The Amazons were originally seated in Cappadocia, on the rugged banks of the Thermodon; but, as their numbers increased, they extended their narrow territory, by successive acquisitions, as far as the Caspian

sea, and, at one time, actually contended for the empire of Asia. Of their cities, Smyrna still remains to attest their ancient puissance, and they were also the founders of Ephesus, Magnesia, Thyatira, and Themseyra. The last was the capital of their dominions; and long retained its original importance, but the Amazons, as a nation, probably never recovered from their signal defeat by the Greeks, so emphatically referred to by Priam. Herodotus mentions that the victors, after dividing the spoil, filled three large ships with captive Amazons, and put to sea, when the indomitable heroines suddenly fell upon them, and cut them in pieces. The wind and waves carried the doomed ships to Cremni, in Scythia, where the liberated band, resuming their bows and javelins, which they found on board, boldly landed. They were instantly attacked by the Scythians, and a sanguinary battle ensued, which, however, led, in the end, to a more friendly meeting, and ultimately the Amazons consented to accept a party of Scythian youths as their husbands. But it was stipulated on their part, as the first condition of

this compact, that the bridegrooms were to abandon their country, and seek some new unoccupied territory, where their wives would be at liberty to follow their own customs, without being fettered by those of Scythia; and accordingly the whole company resolutely crossed the Tanais, and founded, on the borders of Lake Mæotis, the powerful tribe of the Sauromatæ. The marriage laws of this race, one of the most barbarous of the Scythian hordes, preserved a tradition of their Amazonian origin, and no maiden was permitted to marry till she had killed an enemy, “in consequence of which,” says the grave historian, “some of them die of old age without being married, as they are not able to satisfy the law.”

A large body of the Amazons, when they could no longer maintain their independence in Asia, emigrated to Africa, and there established a new kingdom, which soon acquired considerable importance. Some of the ancients indeed—and among them Strabo—doubt whether the Amazons ever existed, and consider their entire history to

be fabulous, but it is too well attested to be thus disposed of, and is not so inconsistent with reason as to warrant rejection. Strabo himself mentions a community of women of very similar character. He tells us that in the ocean, at no great distance from the iron coast of Gaul, there is a small island, inhabited exclusively by women, who, neglecting the other gods, devote themselves particularly to the worship of Bacchus, adoring him with numerous mystic rites and sacrifices. They only associate with men at certain festivals, when they cross to the mainland, but no man, on any pretence whatever, is ever permitted to visit the island. Among other barbarous usages, these untamable women had a custom, once a year, of removing the roof from the venerated temple of their idol, each bringing to the spot a pack of fresh materials to form a new one, and whoever suffered her burden to fall, as she approached the edifice, was solemnly apportioned as a sacrifice, and torn in pieces by the others. "It invariably happens," adds Strabo, "that one drops her pack, and so becomes a victim."

But the hasty objections of the incredulous may be met by the fact, not so easily disputed, that Amazons exist to this day in the benighted regions of Africa; and the army of the too notorious King of Dahomey includes a large corps of these martial viragos. Not more than a year ago, they fought a pitched battle with the men of a neighbouring nation, and the conflict was witnessed, with equal terror and horror, by two English missionaries, who watched its progress from an adjacent eminence. The Amazons were ultimately compelled to retire, but not till they had severely suffered, and inflicted nearly equal injury on their sturdier adversaries.

Various barbarous nations of antiquity availed themselves of the services of women in war, and Herodotus mentions, among other examples, the Zaveces, who employed their wives and daughters to drive their war-chariots, thus placing them in the very front of battle. The Machlyes and the Auses, two Libyan tribes, living on the shores of Lake Tritonis, carefully trained their women to the use of arms; and once a year, on

the festival of their patron goddess Minerva, the virgins of each nation, forming themselves into two hostile companies, attacked each other before the temple with stones and clubs, contending for the mastery with desperate resolution. At the close of the fight, the most beautiful of the survivors was presented with a sword and a sumptuous suit of armour; and then, amidst the acclamations of both sexes, installed in a chariot, and conducted in triumph round the lake.

The Libyan women generally, as might be expected from this brutalizing custom, were in a very low condition, both in a social and moral respect. They paid little attention to their persons, and their dress of leather, mantled with dyed goatskin, was, in that warm climate, not the most conducive to cleanliness; hence their bodies were covered with vermin, which, we learn from Herodotus, they were in the habit of biting in two, and then throwing away. Their hair was suffered to grow to a great length, falling in dishevelled tresses over their shoulders below the waist, and they

wore no ornament, either as maidens or matrons, except a brass chain fastened round each leg, and perhaps designed as a badge of servitude. They became wives at a very early age; but no man was permitted to marry, till the King had had the refusal of his bride.

Next to the Libyans, the Thracians were among the most barbarous of the nations of antiquity; and the women of this race, subjected to the same abject thralldom, were proportionately depraved. One custom of the Crestonæan horde is worth recording. On the death of a Crestonæan, his wives assembled with his friends in the family tent, or hut, and warmly disputed as to who had been his favourite, each adducing evidence in support of her own pretensions. The fortunate victor in the contest was carried to the tomb of her husband, and there, in presence of the others, strangled by her nearest relative, and buried with the dead man; on which the surviving wives, envying her felicity, burst into loud lamentations at their unhappy fate, in being obliged to outlive this public disgrace.

A practice somewhat similar prevailed among the Scythians, though, in their case, it was followed only at the funeral of a King. The corpse of the monarch, after being carefully embalmed, and encased in a coat of wax, was laid in a large pit on a bed of leaves, and covered over with mats; and his favourite wife, brought to the spot in a sumptuous chariot, was then publicly strangled, and deposited by his side. At the same time, his cook, page, groom, and courier, with four fleet horses, and a number of other animals, were also slaughtered, so that they might accompany the deceased pair on their mysterious journey, and gold goblets were provided for the accommodation of the party, that they might want for nothing on the road.

Except at the funeral of a King, the Scythians rarely put a woman to death; and though it was customary, in administering the laws, to punish the family of a criminal as well as himself, his wives and daughters were invariably spared, and even their personal offences were visited with comparatively light penalties. By

their husbands, however, they were very barbarously used, and condemned to the most degrading bondage.

In one of their marauding expeditions to Media, the Scythians were so long absent from home, that their wives, supposing they had been killed in battle, or were detained in captivity, formed a matrimonial alliance with their slaves; and on the return of the rightful lords, all parties were, to their mutual dismay, involved in a very disagreeable embroilment. The slaves, however, were determined not to resign either their consorts or their liberty, and a fierce battle ensued, in which both sides experienced great losses, though neither could claim the victory. In this dilemma a Scythian chief proposed that each man should single out his own slaves, and, laying aside his bow and javelin, ride at them with a horsewhip, when, from force of habit, they would probably take to flight, and naturally fall into their old subjection. The manœuvre, which was instantly put in practice, succeeded admirably, and, by this bold measure, the Scythians recovered at once both their wives and their slaves.

The Scythians derived many of their social usages from the Hyperboreans, a still more northerly nation, of very remote antiquity, being mentioned incidentally both by Hesiod and Homer. Women were admitted by the Hyperboreans to the highest offices of religion, which, though a practice common among the Greeks, was a rare occurrence among barbarians, particularly in the north. The Britons, indeed, included women in the Druidical order; and the Satræ, a Thracian horde, who long preserved their independence, entrusted the oracle of Bacchus to the exclusive care of a priestess. But these instances were notable exceptions to the rule, and in most cases, the religious functions were wholly appropriated by men.

The peculiar religious institutions of the Hyperboreans were established in honour of two virgins, Hyperoche and Laodice, or, as some say, Arge and Opis, who proceeded as missionaries into the neighbouring countries, and met their death at Delos. Their memory was perpetuated in the marriage-ceremony of the Hyperboreans, and no

union was complete, till the bride, arrayed in nuptial attire, laid one of her flowing tresses, wound round a distaff, on the tomb of the two virgins, in the temple of Diana, where the bridegroom also deposited a votive lock, twined round a plant, and the marriage was thus announced to their kindred and friends.

Among the barbarous nations of Western Europe, the sex held a position little, if at all, in advance of that which it filled in the North and the East. Strabo has preserved some particulars respecting the women of Iberia, which give a melancholy picture of their condition. Their degradation, indeed, seems to have resulted, not so much from absolute ill-treatment, as from the ancient usages of the country, which awarded to woman the province of toil, and that of war to man. It is true, they were assigned also a part in the public festivals, and, like the Spanish damsels of the present day, joined in the dance hand in hand with men. But the yoke of servitude imposed upon them, even at a time when every sentiment of nature pleaded for commiseration, was

never relaxed, and it was a common occurrence for children to be born while their mothers were actually working in the field. Such habits naturally destroyed the sensibility, as well as hardened and defaced the character, and the Iberian women were but too strongly imbrued with the fierce spirit of their mates. Strabo relates that, in the war against the Cantabrians, mothers deliberately murdered their children rather than suffer them to be captured; and on one occasion, an Iberian woman slew a number of her fellow-captives as the only means of terminating their slavery. But with all their ferocity, they possessed one weakness common to the sex in every country: they were extremely fond of dress. Looking back some twenty centuries, we may trace the rudiment of the Spanish mantilla in the head-gear of the Iberian belle, which, secured to a fillet of iron, encircling the head, fell in folds over one side of her face and her shoulders, or could be made to veil the whole countenance, at the will of the wearer. The jet locks were worn long, though ladies of

more refined taste, not satisfied with the arrangements of nature, shaved the centre of the head, so as to acquire prematurely that glossy baldness, which it is now the generous aim of Macassar to prevent. Their garments, still resembling the present fashion of Spain, were uniformly black, but were profusely, if not tastefully embroidered—a proof that the hard, rugged toil of husbandry had not impaired their dexterity with the needle. Nor did it in any way affect the natural grace of their movements, which, with the glances of their dark eyes, secured them considerable influence with the sterner sex; and, by an ingenious fiction, they were even allowed the privilege of inheriting property. On their marriage, however, it was, of course, always appropriated by their husbands.

The Goths, scarcely more civilized than the swarthy Iberians, treated women in much the same manner, and, in great exigencies, were often strongly influenced by their counsel and example. In their military expeditions, they were invariably accompanied by their wives and daughters,

who travelled with the provisions and baggage, in numberless waggons, forming a sort of commissariat to the barbaric host, and after a battle, they removed and tended the wounded with the zeal and pious care of veritable sisters of charity. At times, they even presented themselves on the field, and incited their husbands to renewed feats of valour and daring. In the most critical moment of the battle of Verona, when the Goths were seeking safety in flight, the beautiful and gifted Amalasuntha, whose charms and learning would have graced the most polished court, arrested Theodoric in his retreat, and peremptorily commanded him to return to the combat. The hero obeyed, and achieved a glorious victory. On the capture of Ravenna by Belisarius, the Gothic matrons spit in the faces of their dejected husbands, in contemptuous derision of their supineness and pusillanimity. The women were also uniformly admitted to a share in the spoil; and they rarely failed to secure the richest portion. A bride always received from her husband, on the morning succeeding her nuptials, a special

wedding-gift, corresponding in value with his station and means; and this exclusive property could only be alienated by her own act. At the marriage of Placidia with Adolphus, the royal bride was attended by fifty beautiful youths, who presented her, in the name of her Gothic husband, the conqueror of Italy, with a hundred basins of gold, filled alternately with pieces of the precious metal and the most priceless gems. Among the other treasures acquired by the bride on this occasion, was, in all probability, the celebrated table, called ~~the~~ table of Solomon, composed, it is said, of one immense emerald, set in three rows of pearls, and resting on three hundred and sixty-five bars of solid gold, profusely studded with gems.

Women were treated with less consideration by the Britons, owing, no doubt, to their sanction of polygamy, which they are said to have carried to such an extent, that it was no uncommon thing to find a Briton's mud hovel promiscuously tenanted by ten wives and fifty children. Still these untutored savages, living almost in a state of

nature, invested the weaker creation with some touches of sentiment; and the sad story of Boadicea's wrongs enlisted the whole nation in her cause. The injured queen herself, with her two daughters, the innocent cause of her misfortunes, personally led the British host to battle. She had previously harangued the army from her simple throne—a pile of green turf, collected and raised by the hands of her subjects; and on this she sat, a queen indeed, although her brightest ornament was her own golden tresses, falling in rich luxuriance to her waist. Martia, another British queen, is said to have originated the practice of trial by jury, afterwards perfected by the great Alfred, and still regarded as the palladium of our national liberties. The fair Queen Gweniver will ever be associated with the immortal fame of Arthur, and with his Knights of the Round Table; though poetry and romance, perhaps without just cause, have done their best to asperse her name, and blacken her reputation.

During the latter years of the Roman sway in Britain, a large portion of the abo-

original population emigrated to Gaul, and there founded the little State of Bretagne. The usurper Maximus carried across the channel an immense host, and it was on this occasion that St. Ursula, with eleven thousand noble, and sixty thousand plebeian virgins, the destined brides of the adventurous emigrants, committed themselves to the treacherous custody of the waves. The fleet containing the lovely Argonauts was, however, driven by adverse winds on to the rocky coast of Germany, and the whole company fell into the hands of the Huns, by whom they were barbarously massacred.

Women were at all times treated with great cruelty by the savage and perfidious Huns. As an Asiatic people, they looked on polygamy as a natural institution, and their wives and daughters as merely a portion of their chattels. The latter themselves, indeed, had been brought to entertain a similar opinion; and this was strikingly manifested by Bleda, the widowed sister-in-law of Attila, in her reception of the Roman ambassadors, on the occasion of

their proceeding to negotiate a peace with the victorious chief. They also retained the Eastern custom of visiting the sins of the husband on his innocent wife; and the spouse of a Roxolan chief, who had deserted to the enemy, was condemned by the ruthless Hermanric to be torn asunder by wild asses—a common punishment among this fierce people.

It was customary for the women of the royal village to go in procession to meet Attila, on his return from a military expedition. The way was marshalled by a chosen band of maidens, walking under a sumptuous canopy, and who, as they came up, received the warrior king with hymns of triumph; then, wheeling round, preceded him to the palace, surrounded by all the other women of the village, ranged in regular lines, and occasionally joining in the national pæan.

Other savage nations emulated, and perhaps surpassed, the example of the Huns, in their inhuman oppression of the sex. Female captives were impaled alive by the Slavonians, or stretched between four posts,

and beaten to death with clubs. Women were sacrificed to the heathen gods by the Franks, in the camp of the Christian King Clovis. The frightful excesses of the depraved Lombards cannot be related by the pen of the historian; and one diabolical horde, insatiable of blood and rapine, left the mangled bodies of young girls to be devoured by vultures, while another chopped their quivering limbs in atoms, and scattered them to the winds.

The condition of women in the rear of the furious hordes who swept, at various times, over the Roman world, it is beyond not only the powers of description, but the capacity of imagination, to realise. Bereft of everything that can render the world and life of value, they were left in territories turned into deserts, and were often reduced, in their utter destitution, to the horrible necessity of feeding on human flesh. Acorns were esteemed a delicacy in countries once teeming with every product and gift of nature; and Procopius relates, that two wretched women, who had discovered an obscure and solitary lair, successively sur-

prised and murdered seventeen travellers, who found a grave in their emaciated bodies. The same author computes the numbers who perished from the various barbarian inroads, during the single reign of Justinian, at no less than six millions; and of these the greater portion were women.

The ancient Germans were proudly distinguished for the consideration and tender indulgence which they evinced for women, particularly for those of their own nation. Tacitus has preserved, in his piquant and epigrammatic pages, some vivid glimpses of their domestic life, which are equally creditable to both sexes. The cave or hut of the Teutonic warrior was the home of virtue, innocence, and truth. His wife and daughter, his companions in peace, were his solace in war, attending him in his most hazardous enterprises, and eagerly sharing the toil of the march, the severe hardships of the camp, and the dangers of the field. In times of peril, the Germans ever looked to their wives for counsel, encouragement, and support; and the wise women of the

nation, solemnly set apart from the others, and invested with the title of Helleda, were regarded with profound reverence, endowed with peculiar privileges, and universally recognised as the interpreters of fate.

III.

THE DARK AND MIDDLE AGES.

BETWEEN the intellectual light of modern times and the civilization of ancient Rome, the dark ages, as they are emphatically called, stand like a blank, or rather an eclipse, which awakens a mingled feeling of wonder and awe. Not only were the arts and sciences dormant, or wholly lost, but all the incidents of the era partook of its profound gloom, and were like deeds done in the night. If the horizon was for a moment illumined, it was by lightning breaking from the thunder-cloud, by the flash of a meteor, which expired as it appeared, serving, indeed, only to render darkness visible.

Learning was dead, and religion itself was shrouded and disguised in an unknown tongue.

The see of Rome, which had laid its foundations on the ruins of the empire, gradually arrogated to itself the supreme direction of temporal as well as spiritual affairs, and claimed for its bishop the potent attributes of a sovereign pontiff. Not only distant churches, but cathedrals and rich abbeys, monasteries, and convents, peopled by idle crowds of monks and nuns, given up to bigoted devotion, or to still less excusable practices, here following an ascetic, there a too indulgent course of life, all admitted its supremacy, and acknowledged the reigning bishop as the vicegerent of the Redeemer. Popes announced themselves as umpires and arbitrators between kings; prelates dictated terms to princes; and the successors of the humble fishermen of Galilee, who were forbidden to have two coats, or to furnish themselves with either purse or scrip, were surrounded by all the accessories of Asiatic pomp. This, however, was not the worst effect of the system. Its principal,

earnest, and unremitted aim was to render every power subordinate to the priests, who, in their turn, were the submissive creatures of the Pope; and hence it enslaved the conscience, and consequently the intellect, of mankind, overwhelming the whole world in a deluge of barbarism.

The first Christian king was Clovis, son of Childeric, by Basina, Queen of the Thuringians, who, with a levity characteristic of the age, eloped from her husband to become the companion of Childeric, candidly avowing that she would have equally preferred any bold warrior who excelled the Salic chief in personal beauty and bravery. Clovis was but fifteen years of age when the sudden death of his father, in the flower of life, raised him to the command of his native tribe, and though it then numbered only five thousand warriors, he ultimately succeeded by his conquests in establishing the great monarchy of France. He was converted to the Christian faith by his wife, the beautiful and devout Clotilda, Princess of Burgundy, who exercised a marked and salutary influence over his mind; and so much was he

affected by her recital of the sufferings of the Redeemer, that he was unable to restrain his indignation at the conduct of His cruel persecutors, and, referring to the awful scene of the crucifixion, furiously exclaimed, "Had I been there, with my valourous Franks, he should have been amply avenged." This zealous Catholic perpetrated without remorse the most heinous crimes, and was steeped in the innocent blood of his allies and kindred; but the Church, intent on its own aggrandizement, shut its eyes on the sins of its potent son, and Clovis readily purchased impunity or absolution by the timely endowment of a convent, or a propitiatory gift to his patron Saint Martin, to whom he had erected a shrine in the city of Tours, though he repeatedly declared, in his less pious moments, that he was rather a costly friend.

Under the Merovingian dynasty, which Clovis founded and consolidated, arose the first development of the feudal system, so long the prevailing government of Europe, and not yet entirely eradicated from its institutions. The father of the French mo-

narchy parcelled out his newly-acquired dominions among his adherents and followers, who held their fiefs on a military tenure, binding them to repair to his assistance in time of war, and follow his standard to the field of battle. The same system extended to the tenants and dependents of these seigneurs, who, on their own domains, exercised a sort of petty sovereignty, too often of the most tyrannical character; and every one was bound, in his degree, to render feudal service to his immediate superior, either personally or by proxy. Such a state of society necessarily led to great insecurity, both of person and property; and the villas and farms of the Merovingian nobles were gradually superseded by castles, garrisoned by their serfs, or by bands of trained soldiers. Military discipline, growing more and more stringent, soon introduced distinctions of rank, and hence arose the various steps of page, henchman, esquire, and knight, with the subordinate and less honourable grades, so frequently mentioned in the annals of chivalry.

Those annals are little more than a dark

unvarying catalogue of crimes. Society, shattered by the political earthquake which had destroyed the supremacy of Rome, was for ages completely disorganized; murder had become not only a familiar, but a domestic incident, common in every household, and branded on every hearth; the most endearing ties of nature were openly violated, repudiated, and contemned; an oath of amity was a sure pledge of assassination, and religion, when it cowed the face of a monk or noble, was a licence for undisguised and unheard-of wickedness. It was, indeed, a dark period of history, when men were without honour and women without virtue.

Hardly could we expect that the gentler sex would be uninfluenced by the temper of the times, even under circumstances of a favourable character; but, in fact, their training, from their earliest youth, was eminently adapted to cramp and deform their minds. Among the humbler classes the system of vassalage produced the most pernicious consequences, leading to a total obliteration of moral sentiments, deepened and confirmed by the general social inse-

curity, which invariably left the weak and helpless at the mercy of the strong. The power of life and death, with a jurisdiction over woman at which humanity shudders, was comprised by the rights of seignory; and when the daughter of a noble repaired to the castle of the bridegroom, in another province, or perhaps a distant country, she was accompanied by a number of the maiden thralls of her father, torn from their homes and kindred, and bound by chains to her litter, as a wedding-gift to the bride. Damsels of the highest rank were separated, in their tenderest years, from their natural guardians, and were reared in the seclusion and superstition, perhaps amidst the secret irregularities, of a convent, till they reached the age of marriage, when, if they escaped the seductions of the consecrated veil, they were placed as attendants in the boudoir of some noble dame, more distinguished for her past gaieties than her present good odour. Here they completed their education, by learning etiquette, which, with the art of embroidery, a knowledge of the finer branches of needlework, the le-

gends of the saints, and their Latin prayers, with the meaning of which they were wholly unacquainted, formed the sum of their attainments. True, a few of the English princesses, while immured in the famous Abbey of Romsey, in Hampshire, were taught to read their missals; but this was a rare accomplishment, and writing was a science which neither dame nor noble ventured to study. More attractive and more congenial pursuits were presented by the chase and the falconry, the chess-board and the dice-box; and learning and the polite arts, which so adorn, refine, and elevate the mind, were prohibited equally by fashion and by religion.

We have seen, in the case of Clovis, that the crime of murder affixed itself to the highest rank, and the most brilliant characters; and even the pious Clotilda does not escape its malignant taint. Enraged at the assassination of her father, who fell beneath the dagger of his brother, she urged her sons, when they had succeeded to the iron sceptre of Clovis, to invade the dominions of Sigismund, the innocent heir of

the fratricide ; and falling into the hands of the French princes, Sigismund, with his wife and two children, was entombed alive in a well. He was himself not free from the stain of blood, and this saint of the Roman calendar, who has received the honours of canonization, had, at the instigation of a cruel stepmother, taken the life of his own son. Bitterly repenting the act, he threw himself on the bleeding corpse, and loudly bewailed the unhappy youth. “It is not his situation, O, King!” exclaimed one of his courtiers—“it is thine which deserves pity and lamentation.”

Alboin, King of the Lombards, usurped the throne of Conimund, put the fallen monarch to death, and, though previously contracted to the granddaughter of Clovis, forcibly espoused his only child, a princess so distinguished for her beauty that, like another ill-fated woman, she had received at the font the proud name of Rosamond. This monster gave his nobles a sumptuous banquet, at which he drank the rich wine of Rhætia from the skull of Conimund, converted into a goblet, and then, re-filling it

to the brim, despatched it by a messenger to the Queen, commanding her to make merry with her father. "Let the will of my lord be obeyed," answered the outraged Rosamond, and drained the skull of its contents. But her inveterate hatred, the result of a long course of ill-usage, now secretly threw off all restraint; and she stooped to the last indignity to obtain a bloody revenge. By this means she secured the services of an intrepid warrior, named Peredeus, who, with her ordinary lover, Helmichis, the King's armour-bearer, fell on Alboin in his chamber, while the Lombard Dahilah, who had lulled him to sleep by her caresses, kept watch at the door. The monarch started up, and endeavoured to defend himself with a stool, but was quickly overpowered, and, after a vain effort to throw off his assailants, received a mortal wound, the smart of which was aggravated by the cruel derision of his wife, who, insensible to every instinct of her sex, smiled as he expired. But the wicked Queen, though successful for a moment, was soon compelled to seek safety in flight, and with

her two lovers, obtained a shameful refuge in the fortress of Ravenna. Here she found a new suitor in Longinus, the chief minister of the empire ; but it became necessary, before she could give him her hand, to emancipate herself from the jealous attentions of Helmichis, whose vigilance rendered him both troublesome and dangerous. A cup of poison offered the readiest mode of accomplishing this object ; but Helmichis, himself an assassin, had no sooner partaken of the draught than he suspected its character, and, drawing his sword, instantly obliged Rosamond to swallow the remainder. Thus the infamous couple perished together, in a manner not uncommon in that guilty age.

The iron crown of Lombardy, which Rosamond's flight left vacant, was ultimately seized by Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, who, on the death of Pepin, succeeded with his brother Carloman to the extensive empire of the Franks. This greatest of the Carlovingian monarchs espoused a daughter of the chivalrous Lombard king Desiderio, with the foregone in-

tention, whenever an opportunity should present itself, of forcibly appropriating the dominions of his father-in-law. The death of his brother Carloman, whom he had incessantly harassed by his arms, at length afforded the desired occasion, as ~~on his~~ invading the territories of the deceased King, the terrified widow fled with her children to the court of Desiderio, who generously gave them an asylum. They were soon joined by the wife of Charlemagne, whom he had insultingly divorced, and the fierce King himself, at the head of a mighty army, then descended like an avalanche from the Alps, sweeping everything before him. Desiderio was taken prisoner, and, with the Lombard monarch, his miserable daughter and the widow of Carloman, with her infant sons, fell into the hands of the conqueror. History is silent as to the fate of the elder captives,* but the young princes, who had the misfortune to be the nephews of Charlemagne, and his brother's heirs, were inhumanly murdered.

By the successive conquests of Charlemagne, the Carlovingian territories were

extended from the banks of the Ebro to those of the Elbe and Lower Danube, and from the rocky coasts of the Baltic to the placid waters of the Mediterranean. The Pyrenees were leaped in one direction and the Alps in another; and the Ebro and the Apennines served rather to mark a frontier, than to fix a boundary to his empire. As protector of the Church, he had the honour of restoring the third Leo to the papal chair, after he had been expelled from Rome by a popular sedition; and so completely did the military success of the hero ignore his crimes, that he was received in the capital of Christendom with eager and rapturous enthusiasm. Here, too, while kneeling before the altar of St. Peter, during the solemn festival of Christmas, he was publicly crowned by the Pope, who, approaching unobserved, placed an imperial diadem on his head, and saluted him with the acclamation of "Long live Charles Augustus!"

Such was the reward conferred by the religion of the eighth century on an open, undisguised oppressor of the gentler sex, who had shamelessly cast off his innocent

wife, despoiled his brother's widow, and murdered her helpless children. Can we wonder that incidents like these, condoned and sanctioned by the Church, encouraged similar licence among the nobles, equally raised above the law, and almost as independent of authority; and that they tended, by the force of example, to corrupt and debase the great mass of the people? The same depraved spirit, in fact, pervaded every class, infecting even the inmate of the obscure conventual cell; and so notorious, at last, were the scandalous excesses of the religious houses, that it was found necessary to meet them by a severe and stringent check; and Christian priests visited the offending nun with the awful punishment adjudged, in more ancient but not darker times, to the condemned heathen Vestal.

The elevation of Charlemagne to the title of Augustus, and his growing power, attracted the attention of Irene, Empress of the East, of whom we have already given some account (see p. 30 *ante*); and that ambitious woman having just deposed her son, and taken the precaution of depriving

him of his eyes, sought to strengthen her precarious tenure of power by an alliance with the renowned warrior. The overture was well received by Charlemagne, who was not indisposed to ascend the venerable throne of the Cæsars; but the deposition of Irene by a popular tumult, at the moment when her designs seemed ripe, prevented the completion of the contract.

The same century brought a greater scandal on the Catholic world, in the elevation to the papal chair of a woman, who, alas! had assumed the garb, but not the insensibility of a monk. Joan, if we may speak of her by her feminine appellation, was born at Metz, and was of humble, though not low origin, having at her command sufficient pecuniary means to carry out her purpose of becoming a votary of learning. Adopting male attire, she proceeded as a student to Athens, where she attended the schools, and was known by the English name of John; though, in derision of the effeminacy of her manners, and the blameless tenor of her life, she afterwards received the soubriquet of

Agnes, or “the chaste.” On the completion of her studies, she repaired to Rome, and obtained the degree of doctor of divinity, acquiring in a short time such a distinguished reputation for wisdom and piety, that, while yet in the flower of her life, she was unanimously elected to succeed Leo VI. on the pontifical throne. For two years she governed Christendom with equal moderation and sagacity, when, one morning, while walking in solemn procession through Rome, between the Colosseum and the ancient basilica of St. Peter, her secret transpired, and the head of the church became a mother in the public street. The same moment witnessed her death, which, perhaps, was not unattended by violence, though history, it must be owned, affords no foundation for the conjecture.

It may well be supposed that a church which claims infallibility would not willingly admit that it was ever subjected to the domination of a woman; but the facts of this strange episode, however they may be disputed by the controversialists of later times, are supported by irrefragable testi-

mony, being recorded by no less than sixty historians of the Roman communion, including monks and canonized saints. Joan is described by Plutina as John the Eighth; and Æneas Sylvius, himself a Pope, relates her adventures in his history, and ordered her name to be enrolled in the verified list of Pontiffs, in the registry of Sienna.

More startling stories might be drawn from the archives of the dark ages to illustrate the abuses, the licentiousness, the corruption, and, what exercised a still more fatal influence, the spiritual despotism of Rome. The last, its unvarying characteristic, from the moment that it became leagued with temporal authority, was signally manifested in the treatment experienced by Queen Elgiva, consort of Edwy, King of England, at the hands of Dunstan, a Saxon prelate and saint; and the career of the latter furnishes a good example of the monkish legends of the period. Of noble birth, and heir to considerable possessions, Dunstan had been educated at the celebrated monastery of Glastonbury, with the view of qualifying himself, by such know-

ledge as could then be obtained, for taking a prominent part in public affairs. Endowed with more than ordinary capacity, he speedily made himself master of the various branches of learning, became an accomplished musician, and, as a further employment for his active mind, even turned his attention to mechanics, acquiring considerable skill as a worker of metals. But in the midst of his studies—and probably from pursuing them too eagerly—he was seized by a malignant fever, which, attacking the brain, for a time bereft him of reason, and, indeed, he appears to have never wholly recovered his senses, as from that hour he always believed himself to be surrounded by evil spirits. On his convalescence, the influence of his uncle, Athelen, Archbishop of Canterbury, procured him a cordial reception at court; but his pride, his irritable temper, and his rude, overbearing manners, soon raised him a host of enemies, and a dark night affording a favourable opportunity, a party of young nobles drew him into an ambuscade, when he was severely beaten, bound with cords, and flung into a marsh. He

was now persuaded by his uncle to enter the Church, and took the monastic vows at Glastonbury, where, in the ascetic spirit of the times, he subjected himself to the most rigid austerities, living in a cell too short to allow of his lying down, taking only such food as was absolutely requisite for the support of nature, and spending those hours not devoted to prayer, or to devout vigils, in arduous labour at the anvil. One day, while thus engaged, he was visited by no less a person than the fiend himself, embodied in human shape,—as he too often is, and who began to indulge in remarks very unsuited to such a holy place and person, but, to which, though penetrating his disguise, Dunstan submitted patiently till he had made a pair of tongs red-hot, when he seized his ribald visitor by the nose, making him utter such yells that, according to the legend, they terrified the whole neighbourhood—not a difficult matter if the sufferer was some unfortunate traveller, only invested with infernal attributes by the diseased imagination of Dunstan. But, be this as it may, the incident

thoroughly established the monk's reputation as a saint, and gave him unbounded influence with every class of the people.

Such was the antagonist whom Elgiva, a young and innocent girl, brought up in awful reverence of the priesthood, found arrayed against her, at the moment that, by the death of her husband's father, she was unexpectedly raised to the throne, and might reasonably have anticipated nothing but happiness. The history and fate of this princess still excite our sympathy, even after an interval of nearly a thousand years ; and we try to recall that mild blue eye, that soft, sweet, ringing voice, which, in an age so barbarous, had power to lure the boy king from the idle revels of the court, and enchain him to her side. Edwy was but seventeen when he ascended the throne : Elgiva, whom he espoused in defiance of all opposition, was much younger. It was on the night of his coronation, while the courtiers were engaged in bacchanalian orgies in the hall, that Dunstan, perhaps maddened with wine, made his first savage attack on the youthful Queen. Edwy had stolen out of the hall to

his private apartments, to enjoy the society of Elgiva and her mother, when the fierce priest rushed into their presence, upbraided him for leaving his guests, and then turned furiously on the Queen, threatening to bring both her and her mother to the gibbet. Elgiva was naturally indignant at such an insult; and her tears, and perhaps her apprehensions, for which the sequel proved that she had but too good grounds, induced Edwy to order the ruffian priest into exile. But, as an ecclesiastic and a saint, Dunstan was more powerful than a simple King; his party raised the standard of revolt, and, surrounding the palace, made both Edwy and Elgiva prisoners. The monarch was pardoned; but Elgiva, as the rock of offence, received the same sentence of banishment which had been passed on Dunstan, with the cruel addition of the forfeiture of her beauty, and a priest's sacrilegious hand seared her face with a red-hot iron, to obliterate the handiwork of his Maker. Thus disfigured, the poor Queen was glad to bury herself in obscurity, till time, more forbearing than man, restored

her charms, when she again presented herself in England, determined that no power should sever her from her husband. But Dunstan was speedily informed of her return, and, now invested with supreme authority, caused her to be arrested, and thrown into a dungeon, where, without bringing her to trial, or accusing her of any offence, he commanded her to be hamstrung, and she expired in great torture, an innocent victim of tyranny, cruelty, and perfidy.

While women of every rank were subjected to this unsparing monkish domination, on the other hand they were treated with equal severity by the laity ; and the peasant who chastised his wife with a stick, or a cart-whip, did but imitate, in a coarser manner, the brutality of the prince and noble. A woman of prepossessing appearance, or a rich heiress, could not travel on the most public road, or proceed through the streets of a city, without the protection of a strong escort ; and often even this precaution utterly failed to prevent her abduction. Not unfrequently the spouse of a potent baron was languishing unthought of in a dungeon, while

her lord was feasting in his hall ; and a French knight, to whom nursery tales have given the odious name of Bluebeard, murdered three of his wives in succession, and for fourteen years entombed a fourth in the gloomy oubliette of his castle. William of Normandy was so enraged at the rejection of his addresses by Matilda of Flanders, that, according to Ingerius, he attacked her in the middle of the city of Bruges, as she was returning with her ladies from the cathedral, dragged her from her horse, struck her repeatedly with his whip, and then, galloping off, left her to reach her father's palace as she could. Another account states that he actually entered the Earl's castle, and, passing through the astonished attendants, made his way to the private apartments of Matilda, where he seized her by her luxuriant curls, and beat her so severely, that she fell insensible on the floor. Yet this ruffianly and cowardly assault reflected no disgrace on the Norman hero, but, on the contrary, was considered a very spirited feat ; and the lady was so softened

by her rough wooing, that she consented, on a second application, to become the bride of her assailant, declaring that he must be a bold and fearless knight who could thus venture into her father's palace to subject her to personal chastisement.

Nor were the resentments and passions of women less fierce, vindictive, or criminal. If there were few of the frowning chateaux of the Rhone and the Rhine, or the stately castles of England, that had not their legends of damsels betrayed, or captive ladies murdered, many had also their dark tale of female violence, their phantom victim of woman's vengeance, who, as credulity firmly believed, might be met at midnight in the silent corridors, the deserted hall, or the solitary ballium. Here it was a maiden who, too trustful or too weak, had provoked the stern anger of an implacable parent; here it was a forsaken dame, who had perished by suicide, or of a broken heart; here again it was a hated, though perhaps innocent beauty, who had fallen by the hand of a furious rival; and the ear caught

whispered rumours of a fair lady who had committed the deed, or who had pawned her soul to the demon. The regal house of Plantagenet preserved a reminiscence of one of its progenitors, the wife of Fulke the Quarreller, Count of Anjou, which will serve as an example of these traditions. It was often related by Richard Cœur de Lion as a proof that “he was descended from Satan, and that to Satan he must return,” and the royal warrior was evidently proud of his assumed lineage. The story affirmed that Fulke, who, notwithstanding his quarrelling propensities, was a very good Christian, took it grievously to heart that his fair consort always quitted church on the elevation of the host; and, determined to cure her of this vagary, he one morning gave private instructions to four sturdy pages to seize her at the critical moment, and hold her down by her mantle. This mandate was obeyed, but the countess, with her delicate scruples on the point, was not to be overcome by four, or even forty pages, let them be as sturdy as they might; and coolly dropping

her mantle into their hands, she hopped out of the church by the window, leaving behind her a most suspicious odour of brimstone, which, as may be imagined, satisfactorily explained both her repugnance to the host and her precipitate disappearance.

But many of these wild legends were founded on real incidents, which have not wholly escaped the grasp of history. Matilda of Flanders, whose alliance with William the Conqueror we have just recorded, had, in the first susceptible years of girlhood, cast glances but too tender on a handsome Saxon, who, on account of the delicacy of his complexion, had received the expressive though not euphonious name of Snaw; and her advances being coldly met, and ultimately declined, nothing could assuage her wounded pride but the blood of the offender. Her elevation to the throne of England placed him completely in her power; he was seized, without the shadow of a pretext, by her obsequious myrmidons, and thrown into a dungeon,

where he was secretly and ignominiously executed.

This is not the only murder laid to the charge of Matilda. At that period, the priests of the Roman Catholic Church, who have been condemned to celibacy since the commencement of the twelfth century, were allowed to marry; and the fair daughter of a canon of Canterbury had attracted the attention of William, and somewhat estranged him from his domestic ties. Matilda first heard of the fact at a time when this Conqueror was engaged in Normandy, and, availing herself of his absence, she ordered the frail damsel to be put to death, which was done in the most cruel manner, by first cutting the ligatures of her legs, and then slitting her jaws. Old Hearne asserts that William, on hearing what had occurred, was so exasperated at the barbarous conduct of the Queen, that he again subjected her to severe personal castigation, and from the injuries Matilda received on this occasion she never wholly recovered.

Two influences, at length, burst through

the Egyptian darkness of society to raise and reclaim man's benighted mind. One was a religious, the other a poetic impulse, but both tended, in their effect, though by scarcely susceptible degrees, to inspire all classes with more elevated feelings, and more enlarged sympathies. Europe owes an inexpiable debt to the valour of the Crusaders, who, under difficulties of a surprising character, opposed the first effectual check to Mahomedan power; and we still kindle at the thrilling lays of the romantic Troubadours. The Crusades, though they ended in the sternest fanaticism, were undoubtedly prompted, in the first instance, by genuine sentiments of religion. It touched the hardest heart to hear, from the eloquent lips of Peter the Hermit, a recital of the sufferings and wrongs sustained at the hands of the insolent Saracen, by those venerable palmers who crossed seas and deserts to visit the holy shrines of Jerusalem, and monkish zeal failed not to tinge the picture with the darkest colours. Christendom was reminded that this sacred city had been chosen by

God as the site of his temple, hallowed by the presence of the prophets, and especially selected as the scene of the incidents and the promulgation of the gospel; yet here it was that the Eastern infidels, after ravaging the fairest regions of Asia, had planted their impious and detested standard on the tomb of the Redeemer. The sad tale interested all classes, and both sexes; and Europe, as one man, flew to arms. Kings left their thrones, barons their castles, bishops their snug cathedral stalls; and received, from some palmer's hand, the consecrated badge of the cross. From that moment they were dedicated to the expedition; and all the objects of earthly ambition, all the pleasures of the world, all the claims of nature, were abandoned, repudiated, and cast aside. They had become for the time monks in mail, the difference being that, instead of a missal, they carried lance and shield, prepared to enforce the precepts and practice of Christianity at the point of the sword.

Such a movement could not convulse

society without communicating some of its fervour to woman ; and the ties that, at the call of war, were too easily rent by knights and barons, still retained their influence in gentler bosoms. Noble ladies did not scruple to undergo all the hardships, then inseparable from a long 'voyage, and the perils too sure to follow, in order to be within reach of their imperious husbands, although, to obtain this privilege, they took upon themselves the stringent vows of the crusade. Woman's heart, indeed, was equal to a far greater sacrifice, and more than one fair damsel secretly followed her lover to the arid sands of Palestine, disguised as a page, a henchman, or a groom. Nor did the dark daughters of Asia prove less romantic or less intrepid. Several Christian knights owed their release from captivity to the fervour and devotion of Saracen maidens ; and one, a German baron, though already wedded in Europe, espoused his deliverer, and subsequently brought her to his castle on the banks of the Rhine, where, far from creating domestic discord, she was

received by his Christian wife with the utmost tenderness and consideration.

Three Queens of England, though all of foreign extraction, accompanied their consorts to the battle-ground of the East. The first was Eleanora of Aquitaine, at that time united to Louis the Seventh, King of France, though subsequently, through events that will be described hereafter, she ascended the English throne as the Queen of Henry the Second. Eleanora assumed not only the cross, but the garb, of a Crusader, and many ladies of the court followed her example, forming themselves into a corps of light horse, and, in this character, submitting to a regular course of martial exercises, in which, by dint of constant practice, they acquired considerable proficiency. But their first essay at arms in presence of the enemy was not so successful as it no doubt would have been, had they trusted for victory more to the irresistible darts of their eyes than to those of their quivers. The troop of Amazons, escorted by a band of sturdier warriors, under the

command of a distinguished and chivalrous knight, had been sent in advance of the main body of the army, with directions from King Louis to await his arrival on the heights of Laodicea. The sun was just setting as they reached the spot, which, piled with black and dreary rocks, seemed to the inexperienced eye of the Queen a very ineligible place for an encampment, particularly when, as she perceived in the fading light, there was a delightful valley below, where limpid streams flowed peacefully between emerald banks, overshadowed by trees. In vain the Captain of her escort warned her that, though so charming to the eye, this sequestered vale was wanting in all the essentials of a military position; that the verdant slopes could be swept by a volley of arrows from the heights, and that the thick umbrageous woods might conceal an ambuscade. Eleanora insisted on encamping in the valley, and, being menaced by the Arabs, the King, who barely arrived in time to interpose, was obliged to hazard a pitched battle, under circumstances ex-

tremely adverse, to prevent her capture. During the action, Louis himself was nearly made prisoner, being compelled to take refuge in a tree, where, surrounded by Saracens, he continued to fight with great intrepidity till a band of chosen troops effected his rescue. The French, though they repulsed their assailants, left several thousand dead on the field, but succeeded in recovering Eleanora and her ladies, who finished their campaign in the castle of Antioch.

Berengaria of Navarre, the betrothed bride of Cœur de Lion, set out for Palestine under the protection of Queen Joanna, the sister of the bridegroom, who, if we may credit the rude rhymes of Piers of Langtoft, cherished a warm affection for her charge—

“ Queen Joanna held her dear ;
They lived as doves in a cage.”

On reaching Cyprus, the two Queens incurred some danger from the hostile designs of a noble freebooter, named Isaac Comnenus, who had established a nest of pirates on that island ; but, through the address of their

escort, they contrived to elude his vigilance. Cyprus was afterwards attacked by Richard, who overthrew and deposed Isaac, and, being joined by Berengaria, celebrated his espousals in the Cypriot capital with the liveliest demonstrations of joy.

In 1270, Eleanora of Castile accompanied her illustrious consort, Edward the First, then Prince Edward, to the third holy war; and was present before Acre, when one of the tribe of the Ausayrii, or “assassins,” made his way into Edward’s tent, and, while pretending to deliver a letter, attacked the prince with a poisoned dagger, inflicting a severe gash in his arm. The miscreant was instantly slain by Edward; and an old legend asserts, that Eleanora, utterly regardless of herself, sucked the poison from her husband’s wound, and by this means saved his life. The story, however, is wholly repudiated by modern chroniclers, though it is difficult to imagine how it could have passed current at the time, when, as we are now taught, it was without the shadow of a foundation.

If the Crusades tended to enlarge the ideas and the intelligence of Europe, by opening

an intercourse with remote countries, and especially with the luxurious capital of the East, where literature and civilization still maintained a last feeble stand, they derived a fresh impulse, a softening and refining tone, from the minstrelsy of Provence. The woody dells and smiling valleys of that beautiful land, where the Muses found a congenial retreat, suddenly burst forth with a flood of song, so tender, so impassioned, so glowing, that it awoke an echo in every heart. War alone had evoked the wild cadences of the bards of ancient Britain, who delighted to dwell on the muster of savage warriors, the fierceness and horror of their aspect, the march to battle, the attack, the bloody and glorious fray; but the Troubadours, while rendering eager homage to heroic deeds, attuned their strains to the softer measures of love. Their romantic lays revived in the steeled breast the dormant germs of human kindness; kindling the first sparks of that spirit which has received the proud name of chivalry, though, in its highest development, this refined gold of the dark ages was, in fact, but unmitigated pinchbeck.

Yet a sensible improvement was undoubtedly effected by the *chansons* of the Troubadours. They celebrated, in thrilling verse, the clemency, as well as the valour, of the successful warrior; and awarded higher praise to his magnanimity and generosity than to his courage. Above all, they claimed a deference and tender consideration for woman, for her weakness, her gentleness, and her beauty, which, though the amelioration was originally more apparent than real, and confined to empty words and ceremonies, paved the way for her advancement to a more secure, more dignified, and more natural position.

The Troubadours were not only the recognised acclainers of virtue: they were the censors of vice, extending from land to land, from castle to castle, the fame of the noble and good, and the infamy of the wicked. To them we owe the foundation of the great moral safeguard of public opinion. Those haughty barons who laughed at the restraints of law, and mocked at the admonition of the priest, trembled, while they jeered, at the pungent taunts of a Provençal satire; and

even Kings learnt to respect and dread these terrible minstrels. Henry Beauclerc was so exasperated by the songs of Luke de Barré, a Norman troubadour, originally one of his friends, that on taking him prisoner, he barbarously put out his eyes. The Earl of Flanders, his father-in-law, sought to divert the monarch from this cruel deed, but he furiously exclaimed—"No, sir, no! this fellow, a wit and a minstrel forsooth, hath made me the subject of his ribald songs, and raised horse-laughs at my expense; and since it hath pleased God to deliver him into my hands, he shall not escape unpunished."

But love was the favourite theme of the Troubadours; and their feelings, no less than their soft and swelling stanzas, were chiefly engrossed by the fair. Their assemblies were called Courts of Love, and were held in presence of the belles of the day, including Princesses and Queens, who, listening to the various compositions, adjudged the prize of their applause to the most successful poet. A Troubadour was licensed to fix his platonic but romantic affection on any lady in Christendom, however exalted

her rank, or irreproachable her character ; and a minstrel of Normandy, a boon companion of Cœur de Lion's, made furious love to the Princess Eleonora of England, the hero's sister, declaring at every court of Europe that she was well aware of his attachment—*for she could read*. Another, still more ethereal, fell in love with a noble lady whom he had never seen ; and was so consumed by this imaginary passion, that he followed her, in a dying state, to Constantinople, where, struck down by a mortal sickness, he sent to implore his unknown mistress to make him happy by her presence, ere his sorrowful pilgrimage was brought to a close. She flew to his couch, received his vows and saw him expire, his last look raised fondly to her face, and her name the last word on his lips.

Jousts and tournaments were among the first fruits of the improved tone of feeling created by the Troubadours. These exhibitions of knightly prowess, though frequently running into violence and bloodshed, were, indeed, in their origin, not without a civilizing and refining influence.

Instituted in honour of woman, they held her up as a being in whom every virtue was concentrated, and whose gentle approbation was the noblest of rewards; and, by converting this maxim into a code, they threw a mantle of sentiment over the barbaric panoply of knighthood, which was reflected alike in the device on its buckler, and in its altered deportment. Each combatant maintained with lance and sword the surpassing excellence or superior virtue of his chosen lady-love, wearing on his arm some token of her favour, and having his love and his principles prominently emblazoned, in a concise and piquant motto, on his banner, his helm, or his shield. A lady of royal or noble birth, selected for her eminent personal loveliness, and dignified with the proud title of Queen of Beauty, presided over the spectacle; and from her hands the conqueror received the coveted insignia of victory. The presence of high-born and beautiful women acted both as a stimulus and a restraint, and men began to acquire a marked amenity of manners, when, even in the arena of the lists, courtesy and a polite

bearing were esteemed qualities as essential in a knight as dexterity and courage.

The most memorable tournament held on English ground, during the dark ages, was that of Ashby, which was attended by knights from every country of Christendom. An open spot was generally chosen for the lists, so as to afford ample room both for the show and the spectators; but Edward the Third, who was extremely fond of chivalrous exercises, and liked to parade them before his subjects, exhibited a tournament in the heart of London. The spectacle nearly cost the Queen her life; for while all were eagerly watching its progress, the scaffolding supporting the royal box gave way, and brought Philippa and her ladies to the ground. Edward, with his customary ferocity, instantly ordered the carpenters who had erected the scaffold to be put to death; but the humane Queen, who had sustained no injury, interposed in their behalf, and obtained their pardon.

The impetus given to civilization by these various influences was, though decided in effect, extremely slow in operation. For

several centuries society remained unreformed, whatever advance might be made by individuals; and woman, equally with man, indulged in all its follies, and all its excesses, while her weakness left her exposed to all its atrocities.

The life of Eleanora of Aquitaine furnishes a forcible illustration of the career of a dame of quality, in that dark and stormy era; for though she became the consort of two Kings, by birth Eleanora was only of ducal rank. Heiress of the rich territory of Aquitaine, her hand was early secured for Louis VII., surnamed *Le Jeune*, and, after receiving the coronet of the duchy, she was admitted to share the regal throne of France. Her adventures as a Crusader we have already recorded; but, whatever her laurels in a military capacity, she did not return from the Holy Land with unblemished reputation as a lady. Her coquetries with Count Raymond, her kinsman, at Acre, though affording matter for great scandal, were, however, less culpable than her flirtation with a handsome Saracen, who

wooed the Queen of France from the camp of Saladin. On her return to Europe, these indiscretions were more openly practised; and Eleanora made a jest of the shaven face of her husband, while, in presence of the whole court, she paid unbecoming attention to his attractive vassal, Geoffrey Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy. From Geoffrey the volatile Queen turned to his son Henry, who, in his nineteenth year, succeeded his father in the dukedom, and afterwards, as Henry the Second, assumed the royal sceptre of England. King Louis, though of a patient disposition, could, at last, no longer restrain his anger; Henry was commanded to leave the court; and the indiscreet Queen was gratified rather than punished, by a divorce. Thus set free, she hastened to present her liberated hand to her lover, to whom she was already betrothed, but so rich a prize could hardly be expected to pass in safety through France; and Eleanora had several narrow escapes from matrimony before she was joined by Henry. At one place, her host, a Count

Thibaut, proposed marriage at their first meeting, and a precipitate flight saved her from the yoke of a compulsory union. At another, she was to have been surprised by an ambuscade; which an eager lover, who had never seen her face, but knew the value of her ample dower, had prepared for her reception. But, by good fortune and her rare address, she eluded all these dangers, and reaching Aquitaine, celebrated her espousals with Henry six brief weeks after her divorce from Louis.

Eleanora was soon to discover that, though he had ostensibly made her his wife, Henry had previously contracted a marriage with another lady — Rosamond Clifford, whose family was as respectable, if not as illustrious as her own. During a sojourn at Woodstock, she had accidentally observed the King following a clue of silk through a labyrinth of trees, in which he suddenly disappeared; and her jealous eye quickly unveiled the mystery, and discovered the retreat of a rival. Chroniclers, with their customary discord, differ materially as to the issue of this incident, which is variously

related ; but, in such cases, we may safely adopt the popular tradition, particularly when, as in this instance, it is in keeping with the character both of the person and the times. According to the legend, fair Rosamond was abruptly confronted by the Queen, who, with a torrent of reproaches, offered her the alternative of a cup of poison or a dagger, and did not quit the spot till the victim of her jealousy was no more.

But the removal of Rosamond, however effected, neither regained for Eleanora the affections of her consort, nor tended to promote her domestic peace. Her family circle, indeed, presented a dreadful embodiment of all the horrors of the age. Her children were arrayed against each other, against their father, and against herself; her husband was a libertine and an assassin, and, neglecting her, installed in her place the profligate wife of his son. In her despair, she remembered the affection and tender indulgence of Louis, the spouse of her youth and first object of her love ; and, disguising herself in the attire of a page, she

eloped from a castle in Aquitaine, intending to seek an asylum in his dominions. But she was overtaken, before she could escape from the duchy, by the Norman myrmidons of Henry, and, again in his power, was thrown into prison, where she remained for sixteen years under restraint, till the accession of her son, the renowned Cœur de Lion, restored her to liberty and to power.

The last days of Eleanora brought out the latent virtues of her character, atoning for many of her past errors and past crimes, and proving how completely, in one point of view, her perversion was the effect, not of innate vice, but of example and training. The thoughtless season of youth had been passed in the giddy quest of pleasure, of power, and of revenge, without reference to the cost, the means, or the consequences: age came, with its bitter experiences, to teach her the vanity of such pursuits—to show her the emptiness and deceitful hollowness of the world, and all it has to bestow. The loss of her favourite son Richard, on his return from Palestine,

where he had so signalized his valour and daring, was one of the most poignant sorrows of her declining years. Travelling home across Europe, Richard incautiously approached the city of Vienna, the residence and capital of his sworn enemy, Leopold, Archduke of Austria; and was discovered in the disguise of a Templar, while turning the spit in the kitchen of an hostelry. Leopold, in accordance with the spirit of the time, which regarded neither the laws of hospitality nor of human kindness, instantly threw him into a dungeon, and it is said exposed him to be torn to pieces by a lion, which Richard, though without arms, by his mere physical strength, overcame and destroyed. Accident at length revealed to Europe the situation of the missing hero. In the days of his prosperity, Richard had contracted a chivalrous friendship for a celebrated troubadour, named Blondel, who, on hearing of his disappearance, devoted himself to the task of ascertaining his fate. In pursuit of this object, he presented himself, in the course of his protracted wanderings, before the

gloomy castle of Tenebreuse, in Germany, where Richard was confined; and, singing beneath its towers the first stanza of a canzonet composed by the King, it was answered from within by the second, on which he felt satisfied that he had now unravelled the mystery, and hastened to communicate his discovery to Eleanora. The sorrowing Queen lost not a moment in turning his tidings to account, and, by her representations and exertions, enlisted all Europe in the interest of Richard. Her letter to the Pope at this critical period gives a melancholy picture of her grief, her distraction, and her remorse. She describes herself as “Eleanora, *by the wrath of God*, Queen of England,” and her scribe, Peter de Blois, as he proceeds with the epistle, thus notes down one of her passionate outbursts:—“O, Mother of Mercy! look upon a wretched mother! Suffer not thy Son, the source of pity, to visit on the child the sins of the parent, but rather let him chastise me, who am indeed guilty, and spare my innocent son. Miserable that I am, why have I, after .

being twice a Queen, survived to experience the sad afflictions of age!" Her unremitted efforts to procure the liberation of Richard, though met by difficulties and impediments at every turn, were ultimately crowned with success; and a heavy ransom from his loyal subjects restored England her King. Trouble and family afflictions continued to mark the life of Eleanora, till, in 1204, she closed her mortal career, reformed and deeply penitent, and was borne to that narrow house where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.

The life of Eleanora of Aquitaine affords an example of a woman of high courage, great decision of purpose, and, perhaps, but little virtue, now submitting to, now boldly repelling, or subtly eluding, the yoke which the barbarous character of the times had imposed on her sex. Another Eleanora, an English princess, daughter of Edward the Second, shows us, in a later generation, the subdued, patient, suffering wife, roused to indignant resistance by the same inexorable spirit. This illustrious

lady had been married, at the tender age of fifteen, to the stern Raynald II., Earl of Gueldres and Zutphen, afterwards raised to a Dukedom by the Emperor Louis; and had brought her consort a dower worthy of an English princess. The union was blessed, in a few years, by a family of beautiful children, the hope and pride of the little state, while the Duchess was not more admired for her personal loveliness than venerated for her virtues. But the stout Duke Raynald had by this time spent her dower; and the treasure gone, began to grow weary of his spouse. Pondering how to procure a divorce, for which he could find no pretext in her blameless life, he adopted the bold step of informing the papal authorities that she was afflicted with leprosy. The Duchess, though surrounded by spies, was secretly apprised of his designs, and met them by a measure equally bold, but wholly free from reproach. Arrayed in a tunic, which covered but a portion of her body, she enveloped herself in a capacious mantle, and leading two of her children by the hand, entered the council-room of the

palace, at the moment that the Duke was about to make a statement of his intentions to his assembled nobles. "I am come, my beloved lord," she cried, "to seek a diligent examination respecting the corporeal taint imputed to me. Let it be seen now whether I am really afflicted with leprosy." And with these words, she threw off her cloak, disclosing the delicate but healthy texture of her skin, while eloquent tears bedewed her cheeks. "These," she continued, "are my children and yours : do they, too, share in the blemish of their mother ? But it may come to pass that the people of Gueldres may yet mourn our separation, when they behold the failure of our line." An incident so affecting and so sublime, softened both the Duke and his nobles ; the royal pair were reconciled ; but the male line of Raynald, as the Duchess had almost predicted, failed in his son, and the ducal crown passed into the female branch.

The spread of a more chivalrous spirit led to the institution by Cœur de Lion of the noble Order of the Garter, which, in 1344, was revived by Edward the Third,

and decorated with its present motto. Froissart seems to sanction the story which associates the revival of the order with Edward's passion for the Countess of Salisbury, whose garter he is said to have picked up, and presented to her in presence of the court, with this exclamation, *Honi soit qui mal y pens*. There is no doubt that the gay monarch was a devoted admirer of the Countess, and the knightly chronicler, in describing their first interview, enters fully into the history of his attachment. The fair lady had been besieged in her husband's castle of Wark, near Berwick, by the King of Scotland, when Edward, at the head of a powerful army, advanced to her relief, compelling the Scots to retreat. At the interview which followed, "King Edward kept his eyes so fixed upon the Countess, that the gentle dame was quite abashed. After he had examined his apartment, he retired to a window, and leaning on it, fell into a profound reverie." This was an ominous symptom, and, in darker times, a royal lover, so decidedly smitten, might not have been left without encourage-

ment. But woman, after so long yielding to the stream, had begun to assume her natural position; and, as she enjoyed the esteem of others, learnt to respect herself. The Countess was in the keeping of her own integrity and uprightness, and saw no guile and no perfidy in her guest. “Dear sire,” she asked innocently of the King, “what are you musing on? Such meditation is not proper for you, saving your grace.” “Oh, sweet lady!” replied the monarch, “you must know that, since I have been in this castle, some thoughts have oppressed my mind that I was not before aware of.” “Dear sire, you ought to be of good cheer, and leave off such pondering; for God has been very bountiful to you in your undertakings. Therefore, if it please you, we will to the hall to your nobles; for dinner will straightway be served.” “There be other things, O sweet lady, which touch my heart, and lie heavy there, beside what you talk of. In good truth, your beauteous mien and the perfection of your face and behaviour, have wholly overcome me; and my peace depends on your

accepting my love, which your refusal cannot abate.” “Oh, my dread lord!” exclaimed the Countess, “I cannot believe you are in earnest; for assuredly this would neither redound to your glory, nor add to your happiness.” And with these words, she quitted the apartment, and took care to afford the King no further opportunity of prosecuting his suit. Edward, however though discouraged, continued to regard her with the same feelings, and on bidding her adieu, again pleaded his love and his devotion. The reply of the Countess was poetic in its simplicity, and heroic in its sentiment. “My gracious liege,” she exclaimed, “God of his infinite goodness preserve you, and drive from your noble heart all evil thoughts; for I am, and ever shall be, ready to serve you; but only in what is consistent with my honour and your own.”

The first chapter of the Garter was graced by the presence of the good Queen Philippa, another bright example of the advancement and elevation of the sex. Many, indeed, were the instances in which the benign influence of this amiable Queen was exerted to modify

and restrain the passions of her consort. We have already mentioned her interposition in behalf of the luckless carpenters, at the tournament of Cheapside; and who does not remember, with an admiration which centuries have failed to diminish, how promptly and effectually she threw herself between the King and the twelve citizens of Calais, condemned to an ignominious death for their patriotism and heroism! At the chapter of the Garter, she was attended by the principal ladies of the Court, who, with herself, were admitted Dame-Companions of the Order, and the wives of the Knights continued to enjoy this dignity during several succeeding reigns.

In that rude age, when persons of noble birth were the observed of all observers, the humbler classes were affected, far more than at present, by the principles and conduct of their superiors; and the improved tone of the higher produced a corresponding effect in the lower walks of life. It had been well were this result accompanied, as it easily might have been, by some community of feeling; but the proud barons

were still the representatives of the haughty Norman bandits, who trampled on the dearest rights of the commonalty, while they insulted and defied the prerogatives of the crown. Viewed with distrust by the sovereign, they were universally detested by the people ; and we now look back with a shudder at their inhumanity, their insolence, their violence, their cruel exactions, and their repeated treasons. A deep resentment had long been smouldering in the breast of the nation, when a tax-collector, in levying the odious impost of the poll-tax, barbarously insulted a young girl, the daughter of a blacksmith, and was instantly struck dead by her father. The collector was in the service of the King ; but it is a striking indication of the popular feeling of the time, that the rebellion of Wat Tyler, invoked by this incident, was directed solely against the usurping tyranny of the barons. This principle was emphatically announced by the rebels in their motto—

“ When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then a gentleman ? ”

At first the misguided rabble carried all

before them, and, marching on London, seized and beheaded many persons of rank, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, and, for a time, endangered the safety of the Queen. But a simple civic functionary, the intrepid Sir William Walworth, by boldly slaying Tyler, delivered the crown and the country from ruin, when they were left to their fate by the recreant barons.

It has always been the aim of the Kings of England, from the time of the great Alfred, to raise up a counterpoise to the power of the aristocracy, by basing the royal authority on the affections, the sympathies, and the suffrages of the people. To this wise policy we owe our present enduring accord, prosperity, security, and freedom. Our admirable constitution secures to each class a proportionate influence in the commonwealth, while all are bound, both by interest and feeling, to uphold the venerable fabric of the throne. This happy result was not brought about in a moment, but was the slow fruit of successive centuries: it was not achieved by a single effort, but by ages of strife and bloodshed,

and the contest, we may be sure, fell with no light hand on woman, either as regards her social position, her domestic relations, or her destiny.

The Temple garden, according to Shakespeare, was the scene of the memorable interview, which obtained for our first civil war the poetic designation of "the Roses." There it was that Plantagenet exclaimed—

"Let him that is a true-born gentleman,
And stands upon the honour of his birth,
If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
From off this briar pluck a white rose with me."

To which Somerset replies—

"Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,
But dare maintain the party of the truth,
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me."

The calamities which the ambitious and unscrupulous Plantagenet deliberately brought on his native land, were to form the chief incidents in the life of a beautiful and heroic, if too impetuous Queen. Margaret of Anjou was the daughter of a royal bard, who, through various channels of ancestry, was titular sovereign of at least half a dozen realms, though unfortunately they were, as far as he was concerned, as visionary and

unreal as any fiction of his muse. Margaret, however, though she had no treasures, brought her consort, Henry the Sixth, a rich dower of beauty, talent, learning, and taste. "There was no princess in Christendom," observes a contemporary historian, "so accomplished as my lady Marguerite of Anjou." Nor was she deficient in more solid and more sterling qualities. Trained in the school of misfortune, she had learnt, in the first impressible years of life, the bitter uses of adversity, and the lesson was not a void—for though, at first, appearances betokened otherwise, she was destined to tread the same thorny path to the end of her career. As she touched the soil of England, racks of dark thick clouds, which had for some time been lowering round, burst into a fearful storm; and rolling thunder pealed an awful salute to the trembling Queen. A short period of happiness and triumph followed her union with Henry, which was solemnized at Titchfield, just as she entered her sixteenth year. Detraction, however, dogged her steps from the moment she quitted her father's court, and the great

muse of Shakespeare has lent its sanction to calumnies, for which, after the most diligent search, there appears to be no other ground than the malice of her enemies. The growing turmoil of the age and the imbecility of Henry invited her aspiring spirit to take an active part in public affairs, and she was undoubtedly led into various unconstitutional acts, which, in a more tranquil period, would have been better avoided. But, in contemplating the character of Margaret, we must remember the circumstances in which she was placed, and look with indulgence on the indiscretions of a princess, who, in a strange land, surrounded by hostile peers, and a misguided populace, found she could rely for action and support on none but herself. At length, the lawless barons broke into open revolt, and it is a forcible illustration of the state of society at the time, that one of these feudal despots, the Earl of Warwick, was alone able, by the number of his vassals, to turn the scale in favour of whatever party he espoused; and, from the facility with which he changed from side to side, acquired the significant appella-

tion of the King-maker. But Margaret, maintaining her royal dignity, was not to be intimidated by this fierce paladin ; and when called upon to arbitrate between him and the illustrious Somerset, she gave her voice in favour of the latter, boldly exclaiming, “ I am of this party, and will uphold it.” The civil war found her equal to the position she had seized, and the prerogatives she claimed ; and she maintained the arduous contest, through good report and evil, in success and in adversity, with the same resolute, unbending spirit. After her severe defeat at Northampton, she collected a new army with incredible rapidity, and advancing to Wakefield, besieged the Duke of York in his own castle, personally taunting him with cowardice, in “ suffering himself to be braved by a woman.” York, whose courage was his ruling sentiment, was goaded into giving her battle ; and it has been asserted that Margaret actually took part in the engagement, which terminated in a complete victory for the Lancastrians, sullied, however, by the indignities offered to the mangled body of York, and by other atroci-

ties. But to follow Margaret through all the vicissitudes of her career would require a volume, and these pages can afford her but a simple niche. There is, however, one incident, typical of the romantic adventures in which she was sometimes engaged, and illustrating also the temper of the times, which it would be an omission not to record. It was after the sanguinary battle of Hexham, that Margaret, with the young Prince of Wales, flying through the forest, on her way to the Scottish border, was captured by a gang of robbers, such as then infested every part of unhappy England. The costly attire of the fugitives revealed their rank, and the brigands seized Margaret by her luxuriant tresses, and dragged her before their chief, stripping her on the way of all her ornaments and valuables, and even threatening to take her life. Death she did not fear; but she besought them, in a voice choked with emotion, not to mutilate or disfigure her body, which would prevent its being identified, frankly confessing that she was the Queen of England, and as such might well ask this forbearance; but the ruffianly plun-

derers, insensible to every sentiment of honour and virtue, would probably have paid little regard to her wishes, and she might have been sacrificed to their thirst of blood, if, at this juncture, they had not begun to quarrel among themselves respecting the division of the booty. The Queen, seizing the favourable moment, with the tact and address she so well knew how to exercise, turned to one of her train, a sturdy squire, who was looking mournfully on, and vehemently exclaimed, “By the passion of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—have pity upon me, and enable me to escape!” The squire could not resist such an appeal from his mistress, a beautiful woman and a Queen. “Mount behind me, madam,” he replied, “and put my Lord Prince before, and I will deliver you or die in the attempt!” In an instant the Queen and Prince were on the saddle, the loyal squire clapped spurs to his horse, and before the gang were alarmed they were galloping furiously through the forest.

Night overtook the fugitives, while they were still buried among the trees; and,

jaded and exhausted, enveloped in darkness, and uncertain where to bend their steps, they were giving themselves up to despair, when a glimpse of moonlight, falling through a sylvan glade, exposed a tall figure in armour, standing at the mouth of a cave, as if patiently awaiting their approach. The man, there could be no doubt, was another freebooter—perhaps one of the gang so lately eluded; but the undaunted Queen had formed a bold resolution, such as the emergency required, and, springing from the saddle, she took the hand of her child and led him up to the robber. “Here, my friend,” she cried, “save the son of your King. Gold we have none to give you, for robbers have already despoiled us; but it is the unfortunate Queen of England who has now fallen into your hands in her desolation and distress; and, O, man! if thou hast any knowledge of God, I beseech you, for his sake, to have compassion on my misery!” And, placing the young Prince in his arms, she added, “I charge you to preserve and defend this innocent Prince, whom I now consign to your care.” The outlaw, man of

violence though he was, was overcome by her appeal, and, throwing himself at her feet, declared, with a flood of tears, that he would die a thousand deaths rather than abandon the Prince, or betray the trust she had reposed in him. And he kept his word, remaining to the last one of her most devoted adherents.

It need not be related here how the long struggle of Margaret, chequered in its course by all the accidents of war, terminated in the murder of her son and her pious consort, and in her own ignominious captivity. From this she was at length released, and returning to her native Provence, she closed her sad and eventful career in a humble château, in the fifty-first year of her age, leaving behind her a name and story that, while great deeds are remembered, will never be forgotten. In the "Lives of the Queens of England," Miss Strickland makes mention of an interesting relic of Margaret, still in existence, which tells the sad moral of her history. It is a breviary, in which the poor Queen has written these words, "*Vanité des vanités, tout la vanité !*"

The same spirit of baronial ambition and intestine strife which effected such ravages in England, passed like a whirlwind over France, leaving it exposed both to the unscrupulous designs of domestic traitors and to foreign invasion. The privileges of seignory, instead of elevating, had degraded the nobility, while they had corrupted and debased the humbler classes; and Cressy and Poitiers, and, in the next century, Agincourt, beheld the proud chivalry of France shamefully turning their backs on a handful of English yeomen. Such a spectacle made the people aware that their arrogant oppressors were but men, endued with like fears with themselves; and, at the same time, afforded a suggestive and dangerous example. On a sudden the peasantry rose in a mass against their lords; castles, villages, and towns were assaulted, captured, and sacked; and an infuriated jacquerie, sparing neither age nor sex, carried ruin, destruction, and anarchy through the whole kingdom.

The death of Henry the Fifth left France at liberty to attempt the recovery of her

independence, with the advantage of contending on her own soil against the forces of a foreign power, directed by the feeble hand of a Viceroy, and the distracted counsels of a Regency. But the energy of the people was inadequate to the contest, and, after a few desperate encounters, they were obliged to concentrate their force for a final struggle in the city of Orleans. This last bulwark of the French monarchy was quickly invested by the English, and now fixed the attention of all Europe. Among those who, unknown and unobserved, listened with eager ears to every account of the progress and prospects of the siege, was a girl of seventeen, who filled the humble station of servant at an inn, in which character, when not engaged in the work of the house, she assisted the ostler, dressed and groomed the horses of the guests, and conducted them to the watering-place. This employment, by mere force of habit, rendered her an expert horsewoman, while it gave her a taste for rough and manly exercises; and the incidents of the siege, related in her hearing by eye-witnesses, often per-

sonally engaged in the struggle, fired her imagination, and invoked in her bosom a patriotic devotion to her sovereign and country. Suddenly she announced herself as commanded by Heaven to raise the siege of Orleans, and crown Charles the Seventh in the ancient city of Rheims. As might be expected, her pretensions only excited derision, till, persevering in these bold assertions, the most incredulous were struck by the burning eloquence of her enthusiasm, by her commanding manner, her youth, her innocence, and her beauty. Baudricourt, the governor of the neighbouring town of Vancouleurs, sent her to the King, at Chinon, and though Charles put forward a favourite courtier in his place, and stood among the crowd as a spectator, she instantly singled him out, addressed him in the name of the Almighty, declared her intention of relieving Orleans, and demanded as the instrument of her future victories an antique sword, preserved in the church of St. Catherine de Fierbois. The monarch, whether influenced by superstition or policy, or by a combination of both, accepted and

recognised her mission, which was solemnly approved by a synod of divines ; and Joan, mounted on horseback, clad in armour, and girt with the sword from the shrine of St. Catherine, was presented to the people as a messenger from Heaven. Her picturesque appearance, her personal attractions, and the dexterity with which she managed her fiery steed, the result of her training at the hostelry, gave an air of reality to her assumed character, and she was saluted with the most rapturous acclamations. In a few days she set out with a convoy for Orleans, which she entered in triumph, cutting her way through the fortified lines of the English, and striking their boldest leaders with dismay. This feeling, so natural in a superstitious age, was deepened by her subsequent conduct, by the skill and fortitude she displayed in defence of the city, and by her repeated brilliant sorties, in which, valiantly throwing herself into the thick of the fight, she bore down all opposition, and so weakened and depressed our sturdy countrymen, that, at length, their commanders were compelled to raise the siege.

Joan had now fulfilled one object of her mission ; the other, which was to crown the King at Rheims, seemed even more chimerical. The ancient capital was in a distant part of the kingdom, and the whole intervening country was occupied by the English, whose posts and strong garrisons, placed at all the prominent points, commanded every part of the road. No sooner, however, had the maiden warrior effected the liberation of Orleans, than she called upon Charles to accompany her to Rheims, for the purpose of receiving from her hands the crown of France. • The monarch, though sensible of the danger and difficulty of the enterprise, responded to her summons, and set out from Chinon at the head of 12,000 men. He had no reason to repent of his temerity ; the English, not yet recovered from their panic, and regarding Joan as a witch, invested with supernatural power, did not venture to oppose him ; every town threw open its gates at his approach, and reaching Rheims, Joan placed on his brow the diadem of Charlemagne.

Would we could end this story of woman's

heroism with the pomp and glitter of the coronation, when the heroine's name, now ennobled, rang in triumphant shouts from every lip; and grateful millions hailed her as a champion and deliverer. It was at this moment, indeed, that Joan wished to retire, having successfully accomplished the task for which she considered herself to have been raised up; but she was unfortunately persuaded by Dunois to enter a city then besieged by the English, and undertake its defence. Now familiar with her presence, our countrymen had recovered their native valour; and in heading a sortie from the beleagured town, Joan was made prisoner, and carried with exulting shouts into the English camp. A court of gloomy warriors found her guilty of witchcraft; and this fair young creature, in the bloom of her beauty and her life—for she had but just reached her nineteenth year—after performing prodigies of valour in the field, and earning a fame not more brilliant than pure, was condemned to be burnt alive, and actually perished at the stake.

While the great kingdoms of England and

France were distracted by civil contention, or foreign war, the state of society in Italy was no less pitiable, corrupt, and degraded. That beautiful and extensive peninsula, once the garden of the world, had never wholly recovered from the ravages of the barbarous hordes of Germany and the North, during the later period of the empire ; and, through all the succeeding ages, it had repeatedly been the prey of the various neighbouring powers, or of domestic tyrants and factions. Such a *régime* necessarily unhinged the whole fabric of society, and the vices of the other countries of Christendom were here developed in frightful luxuriance, and under circumstances more than usually revolting. The family of the Borgias affords a striking example of the ineradicable depravity of the community. The father, Alexander, occupied the papal throne : his mistress, Vaccozzia, was a member of an influential Roman family ; his two sons were elevated to the rank of princes ; and his daughter, the beautiful and gifted, though frail Lucretia, married successively three noble husbands. Cæsar Borgia has been aptly described as

“great amongst the wicked,” and embodied in his character, with a fierce and implacable will, every vice that disgraces and debases nature. After dyeing his hands in the blood of his brother, he became the ready instrument of all the atrocious schemes of his father; and these two monsters, one of whom was the head of the Christian world, kept in their pay a regular band of assassins, who were constantly employed in removing their opponents with the dagger. Others were carried off by poison, administered in the convivial cup or the tempting pasty; and it was at a banquet of this description, prepared for the destruction of nine wealthy Cardinals, who had appointed the Borgias their heirs, that Alexander the Sixth unexpectedly met his death; drinking by mistake the wine which, in an evil hour, he had prepared exclusively for his guests. Cæsar, by the help of a vigorous constitution, recovered, but soon afterwards received a mortal wound under the walls of Viana, in Spain, while serving as a volunteer in the army of his brother-in-law, John D’Albret, King of Navarre; and died exclaiming “I have

prepared in my life for everything but death."

Lucretia Borgia, to whom our narrative more especially applies, shared the vices, if not the crimes of her family; and is associated in the vilest character with her father and her two brothers. This imputation, indeed, has been disputed by Roscoe, but the apostolic journals leave no doubt of the scandalous irregularity of her life, which even in that age was a proverb. In her infancy she had been betrothed to a gentleman of Arragon; but her father, on his elevation to the pontificate, cancelled this engagement, and her hand was given to Jean Sforza, the wealthy Seigneur of Pesaro, and one of the most potent nobles of Italy. While the marriage was yet but recent, an opportunity presented itself of forming a more auspicious alliance, and a shameful pretext was found, by the pliant Curia, for dissolving the union with Sforza, when Lucretia became the bride of Alphonse, duc de Bresiglia, son of Alphonse the Second, King of Arragon. The second husband fell by the poniard of Cæsar, who,

on, forming an alliance with the French party, was desirous of breaking off all connexion with the Royal family of Arragon, and, to effect this object, made his willing sister a widow. But she was soon provided with a third consort, in the person of Alphonse d'Este, son of the Duke of Ferrara, an amiable and accomplished prince, at whose court, removed from the pernicious influence of her relatives, she threw off her vicious habits, and for the remainder of her life, conducted herself in an irreproachable and even exemplary manner. Gathering around her a circle of poets and scholars, she became a benefactress to literature, as well as a liberal patroness of its professors; and having survived all her family, expired, at an advanced age, amidst the regrets and tears of her household, her dependents, and her subjects.

Spain, the first conquest of barbarism, when the fall of Rome shook with an earthquake the rising nations of Europe, at this time advanced, under the sway of a woman, to the highest point of greatness. Enslaved in the eighth century by the Moors, it had

for ages been parcelled out in small kingdoms, connected by no ties of consanguinity, fraternity, or language, but, on the contrary, cherishing the most bitter hatred of each other, and desolating that fruitful land with the hereditary feuds of the desert. The Christian power was gradually restored over the greater part of the country, divided into three independent states, Castile, Navarre, and Arragon, while that of the Moors, receding behind the inaccessible fastnesses of Granada, still maintained a barbaric splendour in the golden halls of the Alhambra. It is to the court of Arragon we must turn for a moment to catch a glimpse of the evil character of the *régime* and the age. The crown of that kingdom, the second in extent and importance of the Spanish monarchies, had devolved on the ferocious John, a crafty and ambitious prince, married to a consort of kindred temper, whom he had raised from a private station to share his throne. Their eldest son Carlos became, by reversion, heir to the little kingdom of Navarre, which, nestled among the peaks of the Pyrenees—the Switzerland of the south—

had long maintained its mountain nationality against the arms and intrigues both of its Spanish neighbours, and of the mightier puissance of France. But Carlos, though a virtuous and estimable prince, was not a favourite with his parents, and endeavouring to deprive him of the succession, they compelled their unfortunate son to resort to a civil war, which his death, by the ordinary agency of poison, brought to an abrupt close. Carlos bequeathed the crown of Navarre to his sister Blanche; but this arrangement was still at variance with the crooked designs of his parents, and they presented the vacant diadem to their eldest daughter, Elinor, Countess de Foix, whose son, Gaston de Foix, had recently become the son-in-law of the King of France. Not content with robbing Blanche of her inheritance, and disregarding all the tender impulses of paternity, which indeed in that stormy era were rarely allowed to interfere with questions of policy or aggrandisement, the unnatural father determined to place the princess herself in her sister's hands; and despite her entreaties, her remon-

strances, and her tears, despatched her under a strong escort to Navarre. The fears which Blanche entertained of the result, and, perhaps, the object of this step, were quickly realised; and she had been but a short time an inmate of the royal castle of Bearne, when poison removed her from the perilous vicinity of the throne, and accomplished the design and the vengeance of her sister.

Such family tragedies are the ordinary incidents of a period of barbarism, but were not, at this epoch, characteristic of the Spanish nation, which had very early made advances on the bright and pleasant path of civilization. Many causes had contributed to effect this result; and the intercourse, no less than the wars, maintained with the Moors—the progress made by these intruders in the development of the arts, which the Spaniards had such frequent opportunities of observing, as well as their incessant forays on the Christian settlements—combined to kindle amongst all classes, a refined, chivalrous, and romantic spirit. This was evinced alike in the polished and courteous bear-

ing of the Spaniards, in their deeds of arms, their high code of honour, and their soul-stirring minstrelsy. The Don Quixote of Cervantes is no creation of the poet, except in its exaggeration; and Spanish cavaliers, armed cap-a-pie, and animated by a deep religious and poetic sentiment, really wandered far and wide in quest of adventures, righting the innocent and defending the weak, in the honoured name of their chosen lady-love. On the bloody field or the smaller arena of the lists, in the battle or the tournament, they were equally distinguished; and the Duke de Medina Sidonia and Ponce de Leon, Marquis-Duke de Cadiz, were, in the fifteenth century, no unworthy representatives of the Cid of earlier times.

The four crowns of Spain were united under the sway of Isabella of Castile and her husband Ferdinand; and to these dominions were added, by conquest and inheritance, the foreign dependencies of Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, and the Balearic Isles. Isabella was the daughter of John II., King of Castile; and at the tender age of four years, was left, by the premature death

of John, to the guardianship of her brother Henry, who succeeded his father on the Castilian throne. A court tainted by the excesses of a young and profligate King was a very unsuitable sphere for so delicate a plant; and her mother, a princess distinguished for her wisdom and piety, soon removed Isabella to the obscure castle of Arevalo, where she brought her up in the assiduous practice of virtue and self-denial, attending carefully to her education, and imbruing her infant mind with a fervent zeal for the interests of religion. In her childhood she was betrothed to the unfortunate Don Carlos, son of John of Arragon; and at a later period, when that prince had been removed by death, her hand was promised by her brother to Alfonso, King of Portugal; but this contract she refused to complete, on the ground of the advanced years of her venerable lover. Henry then found a younger, but not more welcome suitor, in the Grand Master of Calatrava, an ecclesiastic, released by a papal dispensation from his monastic engagements, and authorised to undertake the happier yoke

of matrimony. The King eagerly supported his pretensions; and determined, notwithstanding the undisguised and avowed repugnance of his sister, to effect the union. But the princess was not without friends, nor did the Grand Master lack enemies. "God will not permit this marriage," exclaimed Beatrix de Bobadilla, a faithful adherent of Isabella, "neither will I!" And drawing a dagger from her bosom, she swore that she would stab the odious bridegroom directly he appeared. It is not likely that Isabella would have permitted such an action, even in her own defence; but the zealous Beatrix had no opportunity of making the attempt. On his way from Almagro to Madrid, where his nuptials were to be solemnised, the Grand Master was suddenly attacked by a malignant disease, and was ill only four days when he expired, cursing the hard fortune which snatched him from the world at such a moment.

The death of the Grand Master was followed by a civil war, which elevated Alfonso, the younger brother of Isabella,

to the throne, though he was only in his twelfth year; and for three years he contested the splendid prize with the vacillating Henry. One morning, however, he was found dead in his bed, no doubt destroyed by the usual resource of poison; and the confederated nobles then offered the supreme authority to Isabella. But the amiable princess, who founded her notions of right on principle, not policy, declined the proffered honour, nobly declaring that she could not lawfully reign during the life of her brother; and, through her resistance, negotiations were opened with Henry, the rights of all parties definitively settled, and peace restored.

Three new suitors now aspired to the hand of the wise, beautiful, and accomplished Isabella. Of these, two were the brothers, and one the son of a King—namely, Richard Duke of Gloucester, brother of our own Edward the Fourth; the ill-fated Duke of Guienne, brother of Louis the Eleventh of France; and the sagacious Don Ferdinand, son of John of Arragon, and brother of her first suitor, the unhappy

Don Carlos. The handsome person and polished manners of Ferdinand, allied to her in blood, and endeared by other associations, secured the preference of Isabella, but were not so successful with her intriguing brother Henry, who, as of old, wished to bestow the royal heiress on some creature of his own. Isabella, however, learning his purpose, secretly arranged the marriage with the court of Arragon; and, under the protection of Admiral Henriquez, escaped from the little town of Madrigal, where Henry had intended to make her prisoner, to the friendly and fortified city of Valladolid. Meanwhile, the impatient Ferdinand entered Castile in disguise, accompanied by half a dozen attendants, who represented themselves as travelling merchants, while the young prince, dressed as a servant, waited upon them at the various inns where they stopped, and groomed and dressed their mules. In this way they traversed the country, journeying chiefly at night; and, at length, arrived before the frowning gates of Valladolid. There the prince's adventures were nearly

brought to a tragic close ; for a sentinel, observing some dark figures steal up the approach, took the way-worn travellers for enemies, and hurled down from the ramparts a huge stone, which, but for a timely spring, would have crushed the royal lover under its weight. But calling out his name, hostility was succeeded by the liveliest demonstrations of joy, and he was instantly admitted into the city, where, in a few days, his marriage with the lovely Princess Isabella was publicly solemnized, in the palace of her ancestors, and the presence of nearly two thousand spectators.

The reign of Ferdinand and Isabella was productive of the most important consequences to Spain, to Europe, and to the world ; and it was to the presiding influence of Isabella, to her genius, piety, and beneficence, that these effects were in great measure, if not wholly due. Her patronage of Columbus gave to mankind the rich heritage of the new world ; and she was ever a steady protector of religion, learning, philosophy, science, and the arts. Her

court was a school of virtue, in which the example of her own life was the most beautiful, as well as the most sublime study. She personally superintended the various departments of the public administration, and at the risk of incurring obloquy, supported her minister Ximenes, the illustrious Cardinal, in all his wise, though unpopular measures, for the renovation of the government and the reform of the laws. The great Captain, Gonsalvo de Cordova, shared her friendship with Ximenes and Columbus; and all too soon learnt, at her death, how much they had owed to her justice, her wisdom, and her generosity.

Happy in her marriage, in her reign, and in the affection and devoted loyalty of her subjects, Isabella was doomed to experience the sorrows of humanity in her children. Her son, the best-loved of her heart, and the hope of Spain, died in his youth; and her favourite daughter, Eleanora of Portugal, quickly followed him to the grave. A darker fate was in store for her daughter Joanna, who, at an early age, married the

Archduke Philip of Austria, and had scarcely become a mother, when she manifested symptoms of insanity. The poor Queen was overwhelmed by these successive trials; and a constitution naturally delicate, and worn by care, anxiety, and trouble, left her an easy prey to a fever, which, in October, 1504, attacked her with great virulence, and speedily marked her for its victim. But her great faculties and serene temper remained unshaken; and a few minutes before her death, she turned her mild blue eyes on the sorrowing domestics, who had silently gathered round the bed, and softly murmured.—“Do not weep for me, nor waste your time in fruitless prayers for my recovery; but pray rather for the salvation of my soul.” Thus closed the useful and blameless life of the good Queen Isabella.

IV.

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

THE three great divisions of the ancient world were each named from a woman—Europe from Europa, daughter of Agenor, King of Phœnicia ; Asia from Asia, the wife of Prometheus ; and Libya, the modern Africa, from a native heroine of that name. It was destined that the munificence and enterprise of another woman—Isabella of Castile—should be mainly instrumental in the discovery of the fourth and remaining continent.

Christopher Columbus, an obscure Italian mariner, was the pilot of mankind to this new region. He was born in the famous

city of Genoa, in 1435, and was the son of Dominico Colombo, who, with his wife Susanna, earned a precarious livelihood by combing wool. Christopher early manifested an unconquerable predilection for a nautical life, and commenced his career, like our own Drake, as a cabin boy, at the susceptible age of fourteen. Engaging in numerous warlike expeditions, he signalled his courage in a remarkable manner; and on one occasion, he attempted, though with what success is unknown, to cut out a galley from the fortified harbour of Tunis—in those days the most perilous feat of maritime warfare. But his occasional wanderings to the mouth of the unknown ocean, beyond the narrow outlet of the Mediterranean, inspired his mind with other and more sublime ideas, and he was seized with an irresistible impulse to traverse that mighty expanse of waters, which had so long formed the boundary of the world. A deep-rooted conviction of the sphericity of the earth led him to believe that the wild waves of the Atlantic washed, at no immeasurable distance, the golden shores of western Asia; and in every

fragment of wood that was picked up at sea, every floating *débris*, every law of the currents and the winds, he beheld a new witness to the truth of his theory. Himself without funds to fit out an expedition of discovery, he submitted his views to the King of Portugal, hoping, by a prospect so tempting, to secure his assistance and protection; but, after repeated efforts, he completely failed in this design, and secretly quitting Lisbon, had recourse to the more potent sovereigns of Spain. Fourteen years were consumed in fruitless attendance and solicitation in the gorgeous palace of Ferdinand, and at length, heart-broken by continual disappointments, Columbus was about to try his fortune in England, when the prior of a Franciscan convent, at which he applied for a night's shelter, induced him to make another trial of royal favour, recommended him to some influential friends at court, and procured him an early introduction to the good Queen Isabella. That great princess was interested, if not convinced, by his glowing statements; she instantly became his friend and protectress; and finally, after

encountering innumerable obstacles, which only such a woman and such a man could have overcome, succeeded in accomplishing the great wish of his heart. An expedition was ordered to be fitted out at the joint expense of the two sovereigns; and Columbus was appointed its commander.

It was in his fifty-fourth year, in the autumn of 1492, that Columbus set sail on his eventful and memorable voyage with a tiny squadron of three vessels, only one of which was decked. Even in the present day, it would be deemed a perilous and most hazardous enterprise to attempt the passage of the Atlantic in an open galley, scarcely raised above the level of the water; but it should seem, from the event, that an overruling Providence was especially watchful of these frail barks; and from the moment of their leaving the Canaries, the last frowning gate of the known world, they encountered only light breezes, placid waves, and summer showers. Even these, however, presented themselves to the superstitious minds of the sailors as evil and inauspicious portents, eminently adverse to their

project; the benignant airs of the Tropics appeared to be unvarying winds, inclined eternally to one point, and, consequently, of a character to prevent their return; the dead calm of the equator was a motionless pool, in which their clogged barks were fixed for ever; the vast, wide, unbroken waters were without end, and without bound. They shuddered at the unaccountable variation of the compass; they no longer took comfort in floating branches of trees, or hailed with delight, as from another Ark, the numerous flocks of birds which sailed majestically past—stray messengers from another world. Their ships were buffeting unknown billows; night mantled the sky and the sea, and darkness was in every mind, when one watchful eye, ever scanning the horizon, discerned a light. He pointed it out to the despairing crew, announced it as the beacon of the long-sought and anxiously-expected shore; and morning realised his anticipations, revealing, with its first rays, the verdant slopes of the Antilles.

The inhabitants of the island, untutored children of nature, were already gathered

on the beach, rapt in wonder at the appearance and the movements of the ships, which they considered to be living monsters risen from the deep; and the docile sails, which, as the gallant barks tacked to and fro, were now closely furled, now spread to the wind, they conceived to be wings, with which the huge animals could either skim over the waves or rise in the air. But their amazement was increased when boats were lowered from the stern, and they saw men, or rather gods, as they simply thought, lightly spring into them, and pull for the shore. As the strangers approached, they retreated in dismay; but the kind aspect and noble mien of Columbus, with his friendly and encouraging gestures, dispelled or moderated their fears. They cautiously advanced nearer, gradually drew closer and closer, came up to him, and fell at his feet.

There was only one female in the throng, a young girl, whose beautiful form had never known the restraint of clothing. Her complexion, like that of her companions, was tawny; her features were pleasing, and though they were slightly disfigured by

paint, and shaded by long, straight tresses of coarse black hair, the effect of her appearance, if fantastic, was, on the whole, agreeable. She was won by the kindness and generosity of Columbus, who presented her with some glass beads and hawk's-bells, inestimable treasures in the eyes of a savage beauty ; and from this moment, her simple heart was wholly devoted to the fascinating strangers.

At another island the natives, terrified at the sight of such mysterious beings, fled at their approach. They were pursued by the sailors, who succeeded in capturing a young woman, the wife of a resident in the nearest village. She was of a comparatively fair complexion, though clothing being superfluous in this warm climate, neither her face nor her form possessed any protection from the sun, and her only attempt at adornment was a small gold pendant hanging from her nose. Columbus, as in the former case, presented her with some beads and trinkets, and sent her away rejoicing. She proved an instrument for establishing peace and amity with the other inhabitants of the island, who now flocked to the shore in eager crowds, bring-

ing with them, as a pledge of good will, the husband of the liberated captive, who was profuse in his manifestations of gratitude to the generous Columbus.

The great navigator was especially observant of the social condition and position of the sex in this simple community. "In all these islands," he remarks, "it seems to me that the men have but one wife, though the king or chieftain is allowed twenty. Most of the work devolves on the women; but I have been unable to ascertain whether they are capable of inheriting property, but rather think not." The sovereign authority, as in all primitive communities, was hereditary, descending, however, in the female line, which was considered to insure, beyond all doubt, the consanguinity of the succession. The women were universally gentle, tractable, tender, and affectionate, prompt to love, and devoted in their attachments. Las Casas compares their innocence with that of Eve, before the forbidden fruit, maturing and corrupting her mind, had taught her to blush at the modest simplicity of nature. He might have extended the

parallel to their country, which possessed attractions worthy of Paradise; and the smiling valleys, clothed in all the glory of tropical vegetation, surrounded by verdant, undulating heights, crowned with woods, the trees laden with every variety of fruit, and overshadowing crystal streams, margined by banks of odorous flowers, appeared to their European visitors no inapt representation of Eden.

This picture was soon to be marred and wasted by European cruelty: the valleys, so pleasant, so fruitful, so peaceful, were devastated; the limpid streams ran with blood; the once happy and trustful natives were subjugated, oppressed, butchered, and enslaved.

Columbus, sent in chains to Spain, could no longer interpose between the Spaniards and their victims; and the miserable Indians now beheld the beings whom they had worshipped as gods, literally transformed into demons. The fate of Anacaona affords a melancholy example of their ferocity and villany. This noble daughter of nature, beautiful alike in person and disposition, was the sister of a powerful cacique, ruling

over a fertile and populous district, in the heart of San Domingo; and at his death, she succeeded to the government, and became the happy mistress of a loyal people. The esteem in which she was held in the island is intimated by her name, which may be interpreted as "The Golden Flower," and it would appear, from the concurring testimony of several Spanish writers, that she was endowed with such eminent natural gifts, that they almost compensated for her want of education, imparting a polish to her manners, a dignity to her mien, and a delicate refinement to her mind, which might well recall the truthful words of Gray—

" Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

She was a skilled musician, as far as the rude instruments of the wilderness would permit, and also a poetess, having composed, with little effort, some of the finest of the wild legendary ballads which formed the favourite chants of the natives, and which they sang together in the national dances, on every occasion of rejoicing. Her husband,

Caonaba, one of the most warlike of the independent Carib chiefs, had been made prisoner by the Spaniards, and carried as a slave to Europe; but this, though for a time overwhelming her with grief, did not alienate her from the white men, as she knew that Caonaba had provoked their enmity, and so regarded his captivity as an ordinary result of war. She even consented to give the hand of her daughter to one of the stranger race, Hernando de Guavara, a noble cavalier, who had become desperately enamoured of the young Indian belle, but who, after their union, treated her with characteristic perfidy and cruelty. Still, Anacaona, from policy, if not from feeling, continued to maintain friendly relations with the Spaniards, though they every day subjected her or her subjects to some fresh outrage. At length, she received an intimation from Ovando, the Spanish governor, that he was about to pay her a visit, and, anxious to conciliate his good will, she exhausted her scanty resources in preparing for his reception. He was accompanied by a powerful force, both of cavalry and in-

lantry ; but the confiding Anacaona, relying on her own rectitude, had no suspicion of treachery, and gave them an eager welcome. Ovando was lodged in the best hut in the village ; his troops were hospitably entertained ; and the simple Indians, under the direction of their Queen, sought to please and divert them with their national games and dances. Ovando, apparently in high good humour, proposed to make a return for these civilities, by exhibiting the European spectacle of a tournament ; and on the appointed day, Anacaona and the neighbouring caciques, eighty in number, were invited to his house, fronting the great square of the village, for the purpose of viewing the pageant, while a concourse of naked, unarmed Indians surrounded the lists below. At the moment when all were expecting the tournament to commence, Ovando gave the signal for a general massacre. The caciques, after being cruelly tortured, were tied to posts, and the house being set on fire, they perished in the flames ; the other spectators were put to the sword, without distinction of sex or age ; and Anacaona was ignominiously

loaded with fetters, conveyed to the fortress of Isabella, and there adjudged to death, terminating her unhappy career on the gibbet.

The aboriginal nations of the great continent of America, discovered by later voyagers, were found to exhibit a degree of civilization and social advancement quite unknown among the natives of the islands. On a close view, however, they really appear to have been only raised from barbarism by their superior opulence, and not by the more sterling influence of moral refinement. Both the Peruvians and Mexicans indulged in the horrid practice of cannibalism, and stained the altars of their gods with human sacrifices. The Peruvians worshipped the sun and moon, represented by grotesque figures, enshrined in temples of burnished gold; but, in the dark myths of their religious allegories, they veiled, as it were, not a few ancient traditions strongly corroborative of various statements of the Scriptures. What was scarcely a less singular coincidence, one of their sacerdotal institutions was a maiden sisterhood, called

“the Virgins of the Sun,” in every respect exactly resembling the Vestals of ancient Rome. The most beautiful maidens were selected for the office at a tender age, and, after a solemn consecration, were immured in a convent, or college, where they were placed under the charge of venerable matrons, who carefully instructed them in their religious duties. Their principal task was to watch over the sacred fire, which was kept perpetually burning before the golden altar of the sun, and, at other times, they were required, as a part of their ministerial functions, to weave and embroider hangings for the temple. They were entirely secluded from the world, not being permitted even to communicate with their family, and their vows irrevocably bound them to a life of celibacy; an infringement of which, if discovered, entailed, as in pagan Rome, the awful penalty of interment alive. The prohibition, however, did not shut out royalty, and the Inca vestals were allowed to contract marriage with the King, who generally selected his wives from the holy sisterhood.

Polygamy was confined to the King and

nobles; and the humbler classes, with few exceptions, possessed only one wife. The mode of espousal was as simple as unique. On a certain anniversary, the young men who had reached their twenty-fourth, and the maidens who had attained their eighteenth year, all assembled together in the public square of their native village, and there severally plighted themselves to each other, the only condition of union required being the consent of the bride, and the sanction of the father. The wedding was solemnized by a sumptuous banquet, at which the friends of both families attended; and as all were married on the same day, the rejoicings, spread over the whole country, and shared by every individual, had a really universal character, and constituted a great national festival.

The customs of the potent Mexican community were entirely different from those of the Incas. In the first place, their religion, though both idolatrous and debasing, retained in its rites isolated traces of an original pure source, gleaming through the odious practices of superstition. Under the veil of a

gloomy mythology, the Aztec still worshipped one supreme and overruling Lord, and, like the Incas, preserved imperfect and obscure traditions of the incidents of Genesis. But their most singular religious rite was a baptismal ceremony, in which they sprinkled water on the lips and bosom of infants, at the same time beseeching "the Lord to suffer the consecrated drops to efface the sin entailed on the child before the foundation of the world, so that it might be born again." At other times, infants were solemnly immolated before the image of the God of War, who was also propitiated by the sacrifice of captives taken in battle; but the beneficent God of the Air, who presided over the seasons, and was the especial protector of the husbandman, received only offerings of animals, fruits and flowers.

As children, the daughters of Mexico were reared in strict subjection to their parents; but the parental discipline, if rigorous in youth, relaxed as they grew older, and the rising woman assumed a higher and more independent position. Though their

present representatives can lay no claim to beauty, the Aztec damsels of ancient times were not deficient in personal attractions, and their raven tresses and lustrous eyes won eager admirers. Marriage was contracted at an early age, and was a religious ceremony, held in universal reverence, inso-much that, once solemnized, it could only be dissolved by a legal tribunal, invested exclusively with this important jurisdiction. The position of woman, however, on the whole, was probably not a very enviable one, though she appears to have been at liberty to indulge at will in social intercourse, was admitted to a share in the public festivals, and even enjoyed some degree of protection from the law.

But the empires and the population of ancient America have now passed away: tracts once verdant with pasture or teeming with produce are overgrown with dense forest or immersed in swamp; ruined cities, lying in crumbled fragments, are the only vestiges of a vanished greatness—ripples on the rocks of time; and the few straggling wanderers who flit through the wilds are

like phantom representatives of a dead creation. What must have been the past revolutions of human society, when, within a period so recent—within the narrow limits of two centuries and a half, the inhabitants of an entire hemisphere have disappeared!

V

THE TUDOR PERIOD.

THE period to which I have applied the designation of Tudor, as the most appropriate and descriptive, comprises a circle of ages fruitful of importance to the world, and eminently marked by the influence of woman. Suddenly the nations that sat in darkness saw a great light; religion, so long buried, not under a bushel, but a mountain, burst from its prison; learning came forth from its grave; the lost arts were recovered; Caxton roughly shaped out the mighty engine of the press; and the mariner's compass, that charmed and precious gift, guided Columbus to a new world.

Yet, in some respects, this splendid era might still be inscribed on the scroll of the dark ages. Civilization, born again, was yet in its cradle ; and neither the barbaric magnificence of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, nor the magic creations of Michael Angelo, which revived the glories of ancient Greece, can shut our eyes to the horrors of the bloody field of Pavia, the martyr-fires of Smithfield, or the awful sack of Rome. If, on the one hand, the light of Scriptural truth was once more kindled and displayed, on the other bigotry, intolerance, ignorance, and superstition never appeared in greater strength, in higher places, or in more odious colours. Nor were the standard of morals, and general customs and usages of society, much, if anything, in advance of those universally prevailing in the most benighted times. The celebrated Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre, a virtuous and estimable princess, free from the vices, but deeply tinctured with the levity of her contemporaries, has left us, in the Heptameron, a dreadful picture of the universal profligacy and corruption. In their long subjection

to a cruel domination, women had thrown off their dignity, their delicacy, their virtue, and even their modesty. Amours and scandal were the secret—dice, chess, card-playing, betting, the public amusements of ladies of rank; and women of the humbler class followed the same pursuits, in a more open but not more vulgar manner. Their excesses were punished by their husbands in a very summary way, without any fear of magisterial retribution; and, in fact, a too indulgent lord ran some risk of being carried round his native town in a blanket, as a public spectacle, while a wife notoriously given to scolding was by law condemned to the cucking-stool.

The mode of living followed by women was in keeping with the coarseness of their lives; and we find young, but not delicate maids of honour, in the orderly household of Katharine of Arragon, making their breakfast off chine of beef and salmon, washed down with gallons of ale. They partook of this substantial fare at the early hour of five, dined at eleven, supped at six, and retired to their homely couches at seven. Religion

was only used as a cloke, or an excitement; and pilgrimages to the shrine of some favourite or popular saint, undertaken at considerable expense, and to the utter neglect of the various duties of home, usually served but to cover an assignation, a flirtation, or an intrigue. The numerous holidays of the Roman calendar, occurring every week, were commemorated by public dances, spectacles, and merry-makings, which afforded occasion for similar proceedings; and it would be difficult, as well as painful, to describe the excesses committed in England on May-day, and in France, Germany, and Italy, at the annual festivities of the vintage.

Much the same standard of morals existed in Scotland, though, from the disturbed state of society, it was exhibited in a different form; and the same lips which to-day mumbled the jargon of superstition, to-morrow curled with the sneer of the sceptic. The gay and chivalrous James IV., who closed his brief career on the field of Flodden, was in the habit of retiring, in his graver moments, to the castle of Stirling, to indulge in religious meditation, and on one of these

occasions, he received from the poet Dunbar, an ordained priest, and a chaplain of the court, a poetic remonstrance on his protracted absence, in the shape of a parody on the litany of the Church. Dunbar exults at the endless pleasures of Edinburgh life—

“ We that are here in Heaven’s glory,
 To you that are in Purgatory
 Commend us on our hearty wise—
 I mean we folk of Paradise
 In Edinburgh, with all merriness,
 To you in Stirling, in distress,
 Where neither pleasure nor delight is :
 For pity this epistle wrytis.”

So little reverence, indeed, did the sturdy Scots lords show for some of the most ordinary forms of religion, that it was not till they came under the kindly influence of Queen Margaret, the lovely consort of Malcolm the Third, that they had adopted the practice of saying grace at dinner ; and, to reconcile them to so great an innovation, Margaret was obliged to introduce also the custom of presenting each guest with a cup of wine directly after grace, whence arose the term of “the grace-cup.” Raids and forays, on the lands and beeves of hostile neighbours, as well as of more distant foes,

gave a freebooting character to many of the lesser nobility, and in their marauding expeditions, woman was as often the prey of open violence, as of treachery and fraud. Nor were the higher ranks altogether free from a similar stain. The Dowager Lady Gracius, sister of the great Earl of Angus, was burnt alive on Calton Hill by James V., on a false charge of treason ; and, by a refinement of cruelty, her second husband, a Campbell, whom she had but recently married, was compelled to attend, though he would not witness her execution, and in endeavouring to escape from the spot, fell from a lofty wall, and was dashed to pieces.

Poisoning became a practice universally in vogue, particularly among the higher classes, insomuch that the death of persons of rank, and even of sovereigns, was generally attributed to poison ; and a street in Paris still marks, by its accursed name, the residence of the most fashionable dispenser of deadly drugs. Superstition had its votaries in every class: astrology, as in the days of Semiramis, was still a royal science ; the great Queen Elizabeth was a believer in

Doctor Dee; and Louise of Savoy, a princess of equal discernment, though a generation earlier in point of time, actually appointed the celebrated Cornelius Agrippa to a post in her household, that she might have the advantage of referring daily to his astrological observations.

The very accomplishments of women were perverted to some unworthy or unbecoming purpose. Princess Mary of England, who afterwards ascended the throne, several times danced before the court, in a masquerade dress, as a mummer; and at a later period, in the polished kingdom of France, Marie de Medicis publicly took part in a ballet, at the wedding of one of the court dames. Still, dancing was undoubtedly a very felicitous addition to the list of female accomplishments; and music, so long proscribed or forgotten, was cultivated with equal assiduity. Virginals was the favourite instrument with young ladies of quality, from which circumstance it derived its name; and women of humbler rank, the city miss—or the professed musician, if of the softer sex—played the cithern. But the new gene-

ration of ladies were not satisfied with these little arts—useful, indeed, as accessories to beauty, as artificial graces, but giving no elevation to the mind. As learning revived, women, toiling up the Heliconian heights, sought to reach the sealed fountain of Hippocrene; languages so long lost that they were called dead—a designation they still retain—became a popular branch of education; and young ladies, instead of pricking their fingers over tapestry or embroidered standards, spent their leisure in the acquisition of Latin and Greek, which they learnt to read with ease, and to write with elegance and fluency.

The capture of Constantinople by the Turks drove from the schools of the imperial city the last guardians of learning, diffusing over Europe a number of erudite Greeks, who, fixing their residence in the principal cities, threw open the rich treasures of knowledge to all comers. Books hitherto confined to manuscript, the work of careless or ignorant transcribers, and found only in monasteries, or in the cabinets of nobles, were now produced by the printing-press,

by which, though it was still in its infancy, they were prodigiously multiplied and cheapened. It was no longer considered disgraceful to know how to read and write ; but, on the contrary, the scholar became an object of general respect, and fair ladies held him in as much esteem as the mailed warrior or the belted knight. Sculpture, architecture, painting, awoke, as if at an archangel's trumpet, from their sleep of a thousand years, and Italy once more poured forth her artists to reclaim, humanize, and enlighten the world.

But the one great effect of the revival of learning, its most triumphant achievement, was the translation — I might almost say, the recovery—of the Bible. That Book of Books had for ages been hermetically closed by the seal of a dead language, not only to the laity but also to the priesthood, and had become as obsolete as the laws of Lycurgus. The Greeks saved the precious volume from the wreck of the Eastern empire, and, on their dispersion, reproduced it in Europe. In 1516 a critical edition of the New Testament was published at Bâle by the learned

Erasmus; and the pious Bishop of Meaux, in France, was encouraged by Marguerite de Valois, sister of Francis the First, to translate a large portion of the Scriptures into French, which tended greatly to disseminate purer and more enlarged views of religion in that country. Ultimately an English translation of the whole Bible was printed and presented to Henry the Eighth, who, without consulting priest or synod, sanctioned its dissemination throughout his dominions.

Thus, under the direction of an overruling Providence, the advance of the Turks in the East, which had threatened the subversion of Christendom, contributed powerfully to restore, diffuse, and permanently establish the true principles of Christianity as they are distinctly laid down in the Word of the Most High. The time was very opportune for this mighty, this divine movement, and many incidents combined to give it peculiar force. All classes had become disgusted at the scandalous lives and undisguised vices of the clergy, and were thus

prepared, by the depravity of their existing pastors, for the promulgation of what might really be called a new religion. At one moment Europe was scandalized by the spectacle of a Pope, such as Alexander VI., administering poison to his guests at a convivial banquet; at another, by the exploits of the warlike Julius, who, at the mature age of eighty, doffed the tiara for the helmet, and actually fought in the field against a Christian army; or, again, by the unheard-of scandal of two contemporaneous and rival Popes, dividing Europe and the Church, and publicly anathematizing each other. Meanwhile the Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Dispenser and Source of all Good, was entirely lost sight of, and a rabble of doubtful or worthless saints intercepted the worship of his creatures. So obvious, indeed, was the necessity of reform, both in a spiritual and temporal point of view, that many pious prelates and monks were amongst its foremost advocates, and the infallibility of the Church was openly denied by its own consecrated ministers.

This was the moment predestined by Heaven, so long provoked and outraged, for the appearance, in the humble guise of a miner's son, of a missionary of its will, raised up to inaugurate and direct the blessed work of the Reformation. Two obscure students were walking through the streets of Erfurt, jostling and laughing, though dark clouds, big with impending tempest, had gathered overhead, when suddenly a flash of lightning darted from the sky, and struck one of the young men dead on the spot. The other, terrified and bewildered, ejaculated a vow to St. Anne, that if he should mercifully be preserved, he would dedicate the remainder of his life to the service of the Church, by entering a monastery, and devoting himself to the duties of religion. In this awful manner was Martin Luther called to his solemn and holy mission.

Shut in the cell of the anchorite, cut off from man, and from earthly pursuits, he was now ever looking into the dark world of his own mind, peering into every cavity, every

of the fathers. But, as he proceeded, he felt the necessity of taking higher ground, of using more potent arguments, and appealing to more indisputable authority ; and, under a divine impulse, he turned to the Bible. Here, indeed, he found the great corner-stone of Christianity, and once more planted the cross on the Rock of Ages.

The thunder of Luther's eloquence soon pealed over Germany : it shook the massive foundations of the Vatican ; it resounded through Europe. The reformer, by some pronounced a heretic, by others an apostle, was cited by the Emperor Charles the Fifth to appear before the Diet at Worms ; and, protected by a safe-conduct, boldly presented himself in court, confronted his accusers and the advocate of Rome, and indignantly refused to retract his opinions. All Christendom was anxiously awaiting the issue, when Luther, who alone had preserved his serenity, mysteriously disappeared. On his way home from Worms, he was suddenly surrounded by a body of horse ; a disguise was hastily thrown over him ; and he was

carried off, a willing captive, to the strong castle of Wartburg, belonging to his staunch protector, the Elector of Saxony, where he remained in concealment, and in safety, till the dangers which threatened him had passed.

But, though his retreat was unknown, his tracts and letters continued to be written, and, by means of the press, were promulgated through every state of Germany ; and, at length, his tenets became so firmly established, and his disciples so numerous and powerful, that he was able to reappear in public without danger. His first step was to throw open the doors of the convents, which had closed, like the tomb, on numbers of wretched women, condemned to the gloom, without the rest of the grave. But their very emancipation was attended, in the first instance, with considerable hardship and privation, as the revenues of the various convents were appropriated by the state, and no provision made for the liberated nuns. Luther received many poor girls into his own house, giving them a

share of his humble meals, and denying himself to administer to their support. His kindness to these destitute and friendless women, thrown helpless on a cruel and unknown world, without any means of procuring a subsistence, marks the simplicity and genuine warmth of his nature. He exerted himself among his friends, personally and by letter, to obtain them employment, and in some cases, gave money from his own small means either to establish them in suitable callings, or to enable them to reach a place where they were likely to obtain a livelihood. But where thousands of women of all ages were suddenly cast on society, the distress was, of course, too great and too general to be relieved by an individual, himself a poor and humble man; and Luther's efforts produced but little effect. Still he continued to afford an asylum and a home to all who sought his door, and not a few owed to him their happy settlement in life. Among these fair refugees was Catherine de Bora, described by some as a beautiful, by others

as a plain woman, but for whom Luther could procure no eligible employment. Hearing that she had formerly had a lover, who professed to be much attached to her, he addressed him a letter, urging him to marry the young lady, as she was now free, and endowed with every quality to make him happy. The recreant Lothario, however, declined the proffered boon, and, considering how to dispose of the maiden, Luther came to the resolution of espousing her himself. Catherine was now in her twenty-fifth year, was of noble birth, and possessed an amiable disposition. Her character, on which no one has ever ventured to cast a slur, is thus drawn by her husband, in a letter to Stifel, a year after their marriage.—“Catherine, my dear rib, salutes you. She is quite well, thank God: gentle, obedient, and kind in all things, far beyond my hopes. I would not exchange my poverty with her, for all the riches of Croesus without her.”

Who can tell how much the ardent temperament of Luther was influenced by this

estimable woman? She was just the kindly monitor, the guardian angel, that his bold spirit required; now placing a curb on his fierce zeal, now cheering and sustaining him on his mighty course. It is pleasant to trace a woman's hand in this second dispensation of heavenly truth and knowledge. It reminds us of the first eras of Christianity—of the blessed Magdalen and Martha; and we forget, for a moment, the martyr-stakes of Nero, and the rack of Domitian. Would that we could pass by also the atrocities of our English Mary!

Luther's income was small, and to support the expense of his household, he followed the example of St. Paul, in conjoining with the duties of the ministry the humble occupation, not of a tent-maker, but of a turner. But often the day's wages which he so diligently and laboriously earned, instead of being expended on himself or his family, were generously bestowed in charity, and he gladly stinted himself to give to others. Catherine, it is evident, never complained, and her patient docile conduct inspired Luther with

a noble opinion of the sex. "The utmost blessing that God can confer on man," he writes, "is the possession of a good and pious wife, with whom he may live in peace and tranquillity, to whom he may confide his whole possessions, even his life and welfare." And again—"When I was at school, my hostess at Eisenach had a good saying, 'There is nothing on earth,' said the worthy dame, 'so sweet and consoling as the love of woman.'"

Luther, as if in a prophetic spirit, often mournfully wished that Catherine might die before him, fearing to leave her unfriended in the world. But she was unfortunately destined to be the survivor; and, to the shame of Germany and of Christendom, the wife of the great reformer was, in her declining years, reduced to beg her bread.

Such a great change as that brought about by Luther could not be effected without in some measure deranging society, and so producing a small measure of evil, as a sort of set-off to the good. The revival

of learning had paved the way for the promulgation of the Scriptures: both had combined to break the iron despotism of the church; but, disabused as to what they had long regarded as most venerable, men began to look with coldness, if not repugnance, on other institutions, still upheld by the law. The same rights of seignory which had given rise to the revolt of the English Wat Tyler, and to the Jacquerie in France, now provoked the memorable Peasants' War in Germany, and set the whole empire in flames. The insurrection, which had its origin in Helgovia, assumed its most formidable phase in Thuringia, where it was headed by a fanatic named Munzer, a reprobate of the worst class. Polygamy was one of the doctrines of this impostor; and a band of poor, ignorant women, deluded by his specious orations, accepted the creed, and marched in arms with his rabble host, under a standard of their own. The insurgents committed the greatest excesses, destroyed a number of convents and castles, and made prisoners of their inmates. Many

ladies of rank, wives and daughters of nobles, fell into their hands, and were infamously treated. At last, they were rescued by Duke Antony of Lorraine, who killed nearly thirty thousand peasants, in three pitched battles, and the revolt, after partially regaining ground, was finally suppressed by the gallant Frundsberg, who, unwilling to stain his sword with the blood of his countrymen, suffered the rebels to disperse in the night, without striking a blow.

The horrors of insurrection and war were not confined to Germany, but desolated Italy, and almost ruined France. Louise of Savoy, Duchess d'Angoulême, exercised a paramount influence on the fortunes of the latter kingdom. She was the daughter of Philip, sovereign Duke of Savoy, and, in her fifteenth year, married Charles d'Angoulême, a prince of the royal house of Bourbon. With extraordinary personal beauty, Louise, while yet a child, combined the most rare intellectual gifts, and was mistress of all the accomplishments of the age. Her fine capacity was equal to

any effort; and the impression produced by her majestic deportment was such, that even her gay son Francis, after he had ascended the throne, and become the most powerful monarch of Europe, never addressed her till he had doffed his cap. • But her eminent talents, apparent in all her actions, were almost marred by the love of intrigue and Machiavellian policy too often associated, by perverse fate, with the fervid genius of Italy. Her still, placid bosom, as it appeared to the eye, was a well of furious passions, which at times burst forth with irresistible vehemence, overwhelming herself and all whom she approached in a common ruin. ‘At such moments, no consideration had power to restrain her, and she sacrificed every human feeling to the object in view.

The illness of Louis the Twelfth, at a time when her son Francis was presumptive heir to the crown, inspired Louise with premature expectations of sovereign power, and the Queen-consort, Anne of Bretagne, looking forward to a similar event, hastened to re-

move from France all her treasures and valuables, in dread of the moment when her implacable enemy Louise should wield the supreme authority. But the Duchess d'Angoulême gave secret instructions to the Governor of Anjou, Marshal de Gié, who was devoted to her interest, to intercept the spoil, and to seize Anne herself if she should attempt to cross the frontier. The Queen had no intention of leaving the kingdom, and remained at the bedside of her husband, mournfully awaiting his dissolution; but her rich effects were all forwarded, and, as arranged by Louise, stopped on the way, by Marshal de Gié. At this juncture the King recovered; Louise, from being the centre of all eyes, sank again into a simple Duchess, and Anne was once more the ascendant star. The unfortunate Marshal trembled, and not without cause, for in a few days he was called on to explain his conduct, and speedily brought to trial for treason. He pleaded in his defence that he had acted under the orders of Louise; but the latter, confronting him in court,

boldly denied the fact, eliciting from her victim a touching retort, almost in the words used by Wolsey, under circumstances of a parallel character—"Had I but served God, madame, as I have served you, I should not have a great account to render at the hour of death."

But the most momentous incident in the life of Louise was her fatal attachment to Bourbon, which, in its results, not only entailed a series of calamities on her family and on France, but operated in the most baneful manner on other nations. Charles de Bourbon, the famous Constable, originally a poor cadet of the royal house, had, in right of his wife, Suzanne, succeeded to the vast inheritance of Bourbon-Beaujeu, which rendered him the wealthiest prince in Europe. His handsome person and versatile talents, his noble qualities, his career as a soldier and deeds of chivalrous daring, marking alike the cavalier and the commander, excited universal admiration, while his affability and munificence especially endeared him to the common people. Left a widower in

the prime of life, he soon attracted the attention of Louise, who, after some ineffectual coquetting, openly made overtures for his hand. Bourbon, with more pride than policy, as openly declined the alliance, an indignity which any lady must have felt severely, but which excited the deepest resentment in the stormy heart of Louise. All her thoughts were now given to revenge, for which she found a ready instrument in the unprincipled Chancellor Dupratt, a bitter enemy of Bourbon, and servile in his devotion to herself. At his suggestion, the Duchess, as niece of the deceased Duke Pierre de Bourbon, father-in-law of the Constable, claimed the immense estates of the latter; her cause was espoused by the King, and an obsequious court of law, of which Dupratt was president, pronounced an unjust verdict in her favour. Meanwhile Bourbon was held up to the derision and contempt of the courtiers. His high spirit was chafed by a thousand slights, and everything was done to wound, annoy, and humiliate him. At this moment, when all the worst passions of

his heart were aroused, he was visited by an emissary from Charles the Fifth, inviting him, in the joint names of the Emperor and Henry the Eighth of England, to enter into a secret treaty, in which they formally engaged to secure him the crown of France. Actuated both by ambition and revenge, he too readily yielded to this temptation; after a succession of romantic adventures, he contrived to pass the frontier, reached the imperial army under the Marquis de Pescara, and soon reappeared in the naked borders of France, at Marseilles, as an enemy and an invader.

Louise, when too late, regretted the precipitancy, if not the injustice of her conduct; and now sought, by her wise counsels, to temper the fury and impetuosity of Francis. Marseilles being relieved, the imperial forces retreated into Italy, whither they were followed by a French army, under the Admiral Bonnivet, a gallant but rash commander, who, pushing forward to the relief of Milan, came up with Bourbon at the heights of Sessia, and

there engaged in a desperate and bloody conflict. Bonnivet, who had too surely counted on victory, was completely defeated, and obliged to seek safety in flight, leaving the flower of his splendid army dead on the field. Among those who fell was the Chevalier Bayard, the mirror of French chivalry, whose character has been summed up in those striking epigrammatic words—*sans peur et sans reproche*. The gallant knight received a mortal wound, while seeking to cover the retreat, or rather the flight, of his countrymen, and was instantly lifted to the ground by his esquire, while his blanched lips articulated—“*Jesu, mon Dieu, je suis mort.*” Desiring his sword to be planted upright in the ground, he turned his closing eyes on the hilt, which was shaped like a cross, and was faintly murmuring a prayer, when Bourbon, in hot pursuit of the flying enemy, galloped up. Recognising Bayard, his ancient friend and comrade, he was overwhelmed with sorrow, and burst into tears. “Keep those tears, Charles de

Bourbon, for yourself and for France," said the dying soldier: "What is the wound you have given me, compared with that you have inflicted on your country!" And with this mournful reproach, the good knight fell back, and in a few minutes was a corpse.

But worse disasters for France, already so weakened and humbled, were soon to follow. Despite the urgent entreaties of Louise, Francis crossed the fatal boundary of the Alps at the head of another army, to attempt the retrieval of his shattered fortunes; and a sanguinary engagement at Pavia terminated in his total overthrow, and beheld him disabled on the field, wounded, and a prisoner. A few words conveyed the dismal tidings to his mother: "Madam, all is lost, but honour."

Louise now reaped the bitter fruits of her ungovernable and unscrupulous passions. She had deprived Bourbon, an innocent and deeply-wronged man, whom she had professed to love, of his birthright and name, driven him into exile, and provoked him,

after so often hazarding his life in the service of his country, to fight in the ranks of her hereditary enemies. A signal retribution had overtaken her, and the man she had thought to crush, as a moth or a worm, was the instrument of its infliction. France and her young King were both prostrate at the feet of the injured Bourbon.

The sole comfort of Louise in this hour of anguish was her daughter, the beautiful and famous Marguerite de Valois, Duchess d'Alençon, and afterwards the Queen of Navarre. The mother and daughter were not more tenderly attached to each other than to Francis, who, on his part, fully reciprocated their affection; and so firm was their union, that, in the profane spirit of the time, they gave themselves the appellation of the Trinity. The feelings which united Marguerite and Francis were of the most devoted kind. The King, equally proud of her beauty and her genius, delighted to address her by the most complimentary, as well as most endearing names; and such terms as "*ma mignonne*,"

“my Marguerite of Marguerites,” but feebly expressed his admiration and affection. Marguerite deserved all his love and all his homage. The charms of her person and her mind, though rarely surpassed, were not more captivating than the sweetness of her temper, the suavity of her manners, and the genuine kindness of her heart. • At the same time, she excelled the most accomplished ladies of the day in her attainments and learning; and while she was surrounded by all the fascinations of the court, loved to loiter unobserved on the bleak steeps of Parnassus. Flattery did not withhold from her its customary tribute of incense, and in compliment to her personal attractions, she received the title of the Fourth Grace; while as a scholar, a novelist, and a poet, she shares with Sappho the proud designation of the Tenth Muse.

Marguerite was in her seventeenth year when, at the express desire of Louis the Twelfth—for the crown had not yet devolved on her brother—she became the wife

of Charles Duke d'Alençon, himself but twenty. The young bride was in the first blush of bloom and beauty, as well as of life. Large eyes of deep clear blue shone beneath her dazzling forehead, which seemed to blend with her long golden tresses, looped up, rather than confined, by a circlet of gems. Of a majestic height, her figure was slender, but exquisitely rounded, and combined the symmetry of the Medicis with the grace of the gazelle. The bridegroom, d'Alençon, was handsome, but devoid of every quality that could win the respect, or engage the affection, of a young and gifted woman. It is not surprising, therefore, that the marriage was an unhappy one, particularly to Marguerite. Shut up in the dreary castle of Argentau, the seat of her jealous and morose husband, she had no resource but to devote herself to literature; and drawing around her a few choice spirits, including Clement Marot, the celebrated poet, she occupied her leisure with the composition of the *Heptameron*—which, indeed, it had been better for her

fair fame never to have written. Correspondence with her brother and the good Bishop of Meaux, with the diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, by which she was gradually led to adopt the doctrines of the Huguenots, afforded her more genuine consolation, and strengthened her for the still greater sorrows she was yet to sustain. While these were her pursuits in retirement, at other times, when summoned to the splendid court of Francis, she was beset by flatterers, parasites, and lovers, and surrounded by all the temptations of a gay and dissolute capital. She passed through this ordeal with becoming dignity, and with an unblemished reputation. Yet so incorrigible was the corruption of the time, that, in one instance, she was even subjected to violence; and the Admiral Bonnivet, the handsomest and most dangerous of her admirers, is charged with attempting the crime which, in a succeeding generation, attached indelible odium to the name of Bothwell.

The fatal battle of Pavia, mainly lost by

his cowardice, was the death-blow of the sickly d'Alencon, who survived his ignominious flight but a short time, when, sinking into an unhonoured grave, he left Marguerite, with his large estates, the precious legacy of freedom. Marguerite was impatient to fly to the bedside of her loved brother, now reported to be dying, in his solitary prison at Madrid. A safe-conduct, limiting her visit to two months, was wrung from the reluctant Emperor ; and after repeated delays, and a painful separation from her mother, the Princess embarked at the little port of Aigues-Mortes, and sailed for Spain.

Scarcely could she support the tardy progress of her journey, even after she had landed in Catalonia. "Oh! how tedious," she writes, in a *chanson* composed on the road, "is the way to that goal where all my happiness reposes! My eyes look everywhere for a messenger, and I pray to God continually to give back health to my King :—

" O qu'il sera le bien venu,
Celui qui frappant à ma porte
D'ira, le Roi est revenu
En sa santé tres bonne et forte.

Alors sa sœur, plus mal que morte
 Courra baiser le messager,
 Qui telles nouvelles apporte
 Que son frère est hors de danger."

Far other news awaited the unhappy princess. She found Francis, whom she had seen depart for Italy in the pride of life and health, stretched on a bed of pain in what appeared to be the last throes of mortal sickness. The physicians gave no hope of his recovery, for, whatever they might do for his suffering body, they could not minister to the diseased mind, or pluck from the seared and tortured memory a rooted sorrow ; and it was only the consoling love of his sister, the healing hand of woman, that could raise up the fallen King. The careful nursing, the society, the soothing words of Marguerite, ever night and day by his side, effected what was indeed beyond medicine or the leech's skill ; and, aroused by her presence, Francis gradually became convalescent. In the interim, Marguerite spared no effort to obtain his release from captivity. After incessant evasions, the Emperor was compelled, by her unwearied exertions and representations, to take the subject into

serious consideration, and a treaty for the liberation of Francis was drawn up, but the terms were so exacting and humiliating, that Marguerite could not counsel its acceptance. Francis now began to despair, but not so his intrepid sister. It was her happy fortune to captivate every one she approached, whether noble or plebeian ; and in the narrow sphere of her brother's prison, her sweet and enchanting demeanour had won the devotion of a poor Moorish slave, employed to bring wood for the King's fire. One day, when the silent tears were chasing each other down her blanched cheek, this humble partisan threw himself at her feet, bewailed the captivity of the King, and her own sorrow, and suggested a plan for his escape. Francis, whose height and figure countenanced the deception, was, after dyeing his complexion, to pass out in the dress of the slave, while the latter remained a prisoner in his stead ; and relays of horses were to be provided on the road, to carry him without delay to the frontier. Marguerite eagerly caught at the project, which

was as readily embraced by Francis ; but a treacherous page, who was admitted to their confidence, communicated their design to the Emperor, and the fugitive King was discovered and arrested just as he was quitting his prison.

The part which Marguerite took in this transaction was denounced as a breach of faith, and it was determined, on this plea, to make her also a captive, directly the period of her safe-conduct, now drawing to a close, left her at the Emperor's mercy. A friendly message from Bourbon warned the princess of her danger ; and though it seemed impossible that she could reach the frontier in the time that remained, she was instantly in the saddle, passed unmolested from Madrid, and made her way through storm and rain, over rushing torrents, and almost impassable mountains, to the Pyrenees, where she arrived only an hour before the time prescribed expired.

But, though no longer sharing his captivity, the heart of Marguerite was still in the prison-chamber of her brother ; and

she knew no peace till, through the united exertions of herself and Louise, supported by the loyalty and devotion of the nation, Francis was restored to liberty. Perhaps, he would have stood better with posterity, had he died in the majesty of his misfortunes. •

Superior to the narrow prejudices of Louise and Francis, Marguerite was the mother of the French Reformation; and it is singular that the same great movement was fostered in England by a woman no less beautiful, and raised by capricious fortune to the dangerous partnership of the throne. The name of Anne Boleyn, after being assailed with a thousand slanders, the weak inventions of malice, bigotry, and faction, still awakens the deepest feelings of sympathy and veneration in every English heart. Beauty, wit, learning, piety, all the accomplishments, the attractions, the graces, and the virtues of her sex were concentrated in this lovely and most fascinating woman, whom poetry might have depicted as an angel if misfortune had not made her a

Queen. Blemishes, indeed, she had—who is without? but, as in the case of Marguerite de Valois, for some time her mistress and model, they were but skin-deep—not of the heart: belonging to the age rather than herself. In her, levity was but a manner, and the little excesses of court life became guileless pastimes, followed more from fashion than inclination. Her accomplishments were as varied as they were numerous, and she especially excelled as a musician, playing with equal skill on the harp, the violin, and *the flute!* Châteaubriant, a French nobleman and courtier, describing her appearance in the splendid saloons of Francis the First, compares her musical performances with those of Orpheus, and affirms that they would have enchained the attention even of wolves and bears. As a dancer she might have disputed the palm with Tagliani; and her French admirer tells us that many new figures and steps, invented and introduced by the young English belle, were distinguished by her name. It is true, Anne played at cards and chess, and occasionally

shook the dice-box, but these were the prevailing amusements of the day, countenanced equally by the Protestant Marguerite de Valois and the orthodox Catholic Princess Mary, and Anne did not, like Mary, spend the greater portion of her leisure in the masculine diversion of betting. The ill-fated Wyatt, speaking in the language and with the feelings of a lover, describes her personal charms as "rare and admirable." "Her favour," he continues, in more pedantic terms, "passing sweet and cheerful, was enhanced by her noble presence of shape and fashion, representing both mildness and majesty." Her beauty, however, like the soul within, was not absolutely faultless, and envy soon discovered that her left hand was furnished with the rudiment of a sixth finger and that a large mole, carefully concealed by a collar-band, disfigured her fair round throat.

Anne, though contracted by her family to Sir Piers Butler, early conceived a sincere attachment for Henry Percy, son of the Earl of Northumberland, to whom she was

induced to make a secret promise of marriage, which, the young nobleman imprudently suffered to transpire. The news was communicated to Henry the Eighth, and awakened the sturdy King to the fact that, though yoked indissolubly to another, he was himself enslaved by Anne's artless charms. In this dilemma he had recourse to his infallible counsellor and favourite, Cardinal Wolsey, that "great child of fortune," the bark of whose mighty genius was to be shivered on the rock of this headstrong passion. The Cardinal's first step, in seeking to forward the King's views, was to attempt to shake the fidelity of the accepted lover. "I marvel not a little at thy folly," he said, in a conversation with Percy, which we must greatly abridge, "that thou wouldst thus affiance thyself to a foolish young girl yonder in the court, Anne Boleyn. Dost thou not consider the estate that God"—(alas! how often has that name been profaned in the mouth of a Cardinal!)"—"hath called thee to in this world? It had been most convenient and meet to have had thy

father's consent in this case, and to have acquainted the King's Majesty therewith. But now see what you have done through your wilfulness. You have not only offended your father, but also your loving sovereign Lord, and matched yourself with such a one as neither the King nor your father will consent to." Hereupon the young nobleman, instead of turning fiercely on the busy Cardinal, in the ruffling style of a Fauconbridge, began to cry, like a penitent and terrified boy. "Sir, I knew not the King's pleasure," he said, "and am sorry for it. I considered I was of good years, and thought myself able to choose a convenient wife as my fancy should guide me, not doubting that my lord and father would have been right well content. And in this matter I have gone so far that I really know not how to discharge myself, or my conscience." But conscience, whatever it might be to a Peer, was a small barrier in the eyes of a Cardinal; and no sooner was the word mentioned than Wolsey considered the affair settled, and dismissed the young man with

this soothing interrogatory : —“ Thinkest thou that the King and I know not what we have to do in such weighty matters as this ?”

But Anne, animated by a woman's sensibilities, and a woman's devotion, was not vanquished so easily as her lover ; and she manifested coldness, and even repugnance, at the tender advances of the King. Fear, family influence, and intrigue, resentment at the defection of Percy, and perhaps a faint inkling of ambition, combined, at length, to overcome her reluctance ; and the dissolution of Henry's marriage with Katharine of Arragon too soon advanced her to the fatal dignity of Queen.

Anne's fall was as precipitate as her elevation. Prompted by a new passion, Henry found means to have her implicated in a common accusation with her brother, Lord Rochfort, and four officers of the court, Sir Henry Norris, Sir Francis Weston, Mark Smeaton, and Brereton. The evidence offered in support of the cruel charge would have been ludicrous, had it not been also, in respect to its object, atrocious and monstrous.

Everything was done to wring a confession from the alleged partners of her guilt, but only Mark Smeaton, a man of ignoble birth, writhing under the tortures of the rack, could be induced to say a word to criminate her. An offer of his life, on the same ignominious terms, was indignantly rejected by Norris, who declared that he would "rather die a thousand deaths than accuse the Queen of a crime of which he believed her to be innocent." Anne herself, after submitting with patient dignity to the insult of a sham trial, heard with composure the sentence which condemned her, in the flower of her life, to be beheaded or burnt alive, at the pleasure of her ruthless consort. From that wicked tribunal she solemnly appealed, with clasped hands and upraised eyes, to the Judgment-Seat of Heaven. "Oh, Father! oh Creator!" she cried, yet standing in the felon's bar, "thou, who art the way, the life, and the truth, thou knowest whether I have deserved this death." Nor did her fortitude subside when, solitary and friendless, she returned to the gloom of her prison-chamber.

Severed from the world, deprived of her short-lived state, its pomps, pleasures, and vanities, she was sustained and cheered by the noble energies of her own mind, by the consolations of religion, and by the soothing admonitions of the Holy Scriptures. For her, death had no terrors, and she lightened the more serious duties of preparation by the composition of a dirge, beautifully expressive of her composure and resignation, and which, after setting it to music, she sang with her accustomed sweetness. One stanza, ringing with the inspiration of the heart, shows how completely she was reconciled to her fate:—

“ O, Death ! rock ' me asleep !
Bring on my quiet rest,
Let pass my very guiltless ghost
Out of my careful breast.
Ring out the doleful knell !
Let its sound my death tell :
For I must die,
There is no remedy,
For now I die ! ”

On the scaffold, she preserved the same calm and majestic demeanor ; and it was remarked by an eye-witness, who had seen her in the heyday of her power, that she

had never looked so lovely and engaging as at that awful moment. Standing by the side of the block, she addressed a few touching words to the spectators, declaring that she came there only to die, and thus yield herself humbly to the will of the King, “To me,” cried the innocent victim of a tyrant’s passions, “he was ever a good and gentle sovereign lord. If any person will meddle with my cause, I require them to judge the best. Thus I take my leave of the world and of you, and I heartily desire you all to pray for me.” She calmly laid her head on the block, observing, “Alas, poor head! in a very brief space thou wilt roll in the dust; and as in life, thou didst not merit to wear the crown of a Queen, so in death thou deservest no better fate than this.” And, again entreating the prayers of those around, she commended her chastened soul to God, and submitted to the stroke of the executioner.

Such was the end of one who may be regarded, under Providence, as the first cause, author, and nursing-mother, so to

speaking, of the Reformation in England. Never was so great a work effected in so short a time, or by means so gentle and so blameless. A young and innocent woman, by her sagacity and prudence as much as by the influence of her charms, proved more than a match for a powerful camerilla, a wily Cardinal, and a subtle legate, overthrowing, in a few brief weeks, by her indomitable constancy, that colossal ecclesiastical despotism which had for a thousand years ruled both King and people. History has yet to render justice to the character of Queen Anne Boleyn—to her high motives, her noble aspirations, her virtues, and her genius; and humanity will never deny a sigh to her misfortunes and her fate.

What one Queen so assiduously fostered, and so carefully established, another, her contemporary and successor, vainly sought to eradicate. When the English crown devolved on Mary, the seeds of the Reformation were too widely disseminated, and had taken too deep a root, to be violently plucked up, even by the horrible means

which, not without reason, obtained for the recusant Queen the epithets of "scarlet" and "bloody." Bigotry, indeed, impelled Mary to acts which one shudders to associate with the tender name of woman, and blushes to record. They were, if possible, the more revolting in her case, and the more disgraceful, as the loyal affection of the people had advanced her to the throne, with a full knowledge of her attachment to Rome, yet had refrained from exacting any condition or guarantee for the maintenance of the national faith. Soon they discovered that Mary regarded them only as heretics; and, in fact, her pious fury, arrested by no scruple, outstripped the zeal of her most intolerant prelates, and Gardiner and Pole found the English Church again subject to the Pope, at the moment that they were secretly considering how to maintain its independence. Such measures naturally excited a general feeling of discontent; and Sir Thomas Wyatt, and other Protestant leaders, impatient of papal ascendancy, availed themselves of this disaffected spirit

to raise an insurrection, with the view of recovering the crown for Lady Jane Grey, who, at the time a prisoner in the Tower, was completely in the power of Mary, and hence, instead of being benefited, could not but be placed in extreme jeopardy by their rash proceedings.

Lady Jane Grey was one of the most shining characters of the age; and, by a happy destiny—for she was illustrious rather by her sorrows, and her virtues, than by her deeds—she remains to this hour one of the most popular heroines on the page of history. Beautiful, accomplished, learned, she was no less pious than gifted, and the angelic sweetness of her temper won the admiration and applause of her bitterest enemies. Like Titus, she sought never to lose a day; and her time was distributed, in allotted and regular portions, between the duties of religion, the pursuit of learning, the management of her household, and the endearing occupations of domestic life. Far from coveting the splendours of royalty, she preferred the simple pleasures of retire-

ment, and would have wished to hide herself, like the violet, under the veil of her own modesty. When, on the death of Edward the Sixth, she was saluted as Queen, she fell down in a swoon, and not till her ambitious but imbecile husband resorted to violence, would she consent, by any overt act, to assume the perilous title. She abdicated her brief sovereignty with eager satisfaction, though fully aware of the responsibility and the danger in which it had involved her. In her last moments she was attended by Feckenham, Mary's chaplain, a zealous but not intolerant Catholic, who, though at first regarding her as a heretic, ended by deeming her an angel, and was wrung to the heart by her gentleness and submission. Jane mildly told him that her time was too short for controversy; and, flying to the Queen, he procured her a respite of three days, in the delusive hope that, in this interval, he might restore such a saint to Rome. But the pious lady informed him, with a sweet smile, that he had placed a wrong construction on her

words, as she was quite ready to die but wished to avoid all religious discussions. "True it was," she added, "her flesh shuddered, as was natural to frail mortality, but her spirit would spring rejoicing into eternal light, where she hoped the mercy of God would receive it." And 'in this frame of mind, composed, solemn, but not sad, she ascended the terrible scaffold, still reeking with the blood of her husband; and laid down her unblemished life.

But Mary was not content with political victims and the tame justice of the axe; her pious fury demanded martyrs, and could only be appeased by the lurid flames of persecution. In the upper walks of life, all were ready to conform, and so escaped harmless; but the humbler classes, animated by a higher spirit, clung to the pure doctrines of the Reformation, and boldly accepted the crown of martyrdom. Women of all ages walked without fear to the stake, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer in such a cause, and could follow, at a humble distance, in the footsteps of the devout

Craumer, the meek Latimer, and the holy Ridley. Among these genuine saints was Mrs. Joyce Lewis, the wife of a Warwickshire gentleman, residing at Mancetta, who, amidst the seductions of a gay and dissipated life, had been attracted and converted by the preaching of Glover. On being cited before the Bishop, her husband, though a resolute man, was terrified into submission ; but Joyce adhered to her faith, and refused the orthodox tests of adoring the crucifix, and crossing herself with holy water. Persevering in her constancy, she was thrown into a loathsome dungeon, and condemned to be burnt alive ; but her devout behaviour in prison, under the most cruel privations, so affected the Sheriff, that he continually evaded carrying out the sentence during his term of office, and thus she spent twelve months in confinement, in patient expectation of her terrible fate. This dreadful period of agony was devoted to prayer and religious meditation ; and when, at last, the long-contemplated hour of martyrdom arrived, she could hail it as a relief. On the

previous night, she was visited by a Catholic priest, who earnestly besought her to confess, but she calmly replied that she "had confessed to Christ her Saviour, and looked to Him alone for forgiveness." When apprised by the Sheriff that she must proceed to the stake, she said in a firm voice—"Master Sheriff, your message is welcome, and I thank my God that he will permit me to venture my life in His service." She exhibited the same composure and lofty fortitude at the stake, though the spectators, forming an immense multitude, could not repress their tears, and as the flames shot up around, her face was seen raised to Heaven, shining with the same serene light that beamed from that of St. Stephen.

The last days of Mary were embittered equally by domestic sorrow and vexation, and by political calamity. Her husband, Philip of Spain, whom she had loved with all the little fervour of which her nature was capable, neglected and deserted her; and she was happily disappointed in her hopes of becoming a mother. The French easily

snatched from her feeble hand the keys of Calais, the gate of France, adding humiliation to misfortune; and so deeply was she affected by this disaster, that she declared the fatal name of Calais would, at her death, be found engraved on her heart. Nor can we doubt that she was also haunted by remorse, and by the gloomy apprehensions and misgivings which superstition, whatever plea it might urge, could neither silence nor banish in so morose and so guilty a soul. Death, at length, relieved the world of her presence, and she expired in November, 1558, in the 43rd year of her age.

Scarcely had the priests of Rome administered to Mary their last sacrament of extreme unction, when the accession of Elizabeth, amidst the acclamations and rejoicings of her subjects, once more planted on the soil of England the standard of Protestant truth. This great Princess, trained in the hard school of adversity, under jealous surveillance, a sort of prisoner at large, and sometimes in imminent peril of the scaffold, ascended the throne at an age which, though

it secured her the advantage of a mature and experienced judgment, had not yet thrown off the innate weaknesses of her sex. No matrimonial yoke had sobered her feelings, or dispelled her romance; and she clung to the foibles and delusions of youth, after its bright noon had set. Her character was a strange problem -- a mystery; and it was happily said of her, by one who knew her well, that "if to-day, she was more than a man, to-morrow she was less than a woman." Yet allowance must be made for a Princess who, from her earliest childhood, was exposed to the adulation, intrigues, and sinister addresses of gay, brilliant, and handsome courtiers, eager to seize a hand which might hereafter grasp a sceptre or confer a crown; and, under such circumstances, we may forgive, in the decline of middle-age, what indeed appears ridiculous in the matron of seventy.

Elizabeth was only thirteen when she excited the ambitious hopes of the unprincipled Lord Admiral Seymour, the Adonis of his time. At this early age she received

from him an offer of marriage, which she rejected in terms that, comparing them with her tender years, induce a suspicion that they were dictated by an older and wiser head. Seymour, however afflicted by her refusal, consoled himself within a week by marrying Katharine Parr, whose previous consort, bluff King Henry, had been but a month dead. Elizabeth went to reside with the happy pair, and Seymour took advantage of her presence, to insinuate himself into her good graces. Her severe studies, which included the principal classic authors in their native tongue, and the New Testament in Greek, were often invaded by the handsome Admiral, with whom the young Princess delighted to flirt and romp, in a manner creditable to neither party. The death of Katharine Parr left Seymour at liberty to renew his proposal to Elizabeth, now in her sixteenth year, and possessing at least an ordinary share of personal attractions. There is reason to believe that, through the connivance of her attendants, he obtained secret interviews with the Prin-

cess, at hours when no male visitor should have been admitted, and it is certain that Elizabeth did not absolutely repel his addresses. On one occasion, she was told by Parry, her treasurer, that Seymour “would come and see her grace,” “which declaration,” says this loquacious gossip, in his candid confession, “she seemed to take very gladly. On which casting in my mind the reports I had heard of a marriage between them, and observing that at all times she showed such countenance that it appeared she was very glad to hear of him, I took occasion to ask her whether, if the council would like it, she would marry with him. Whereunto she replied, ‘When that comes to pass I shall do as God will put into my mind.’” Undoubtedly a very prudent answer, which, perhaps, would have silenced Master Parry, if Elizabeth’s confidante, Kate Ashley, had not “disclosed so many particulars to him, especially of the late Queen Katharine finding her husband with his arms about her grace”—not a discouraging remembrance to so wily an intriguer. All Sey-

mour's schemes, however, were baffled by the council, or rather by the superior craft of his brother; and his audacious courtship of the King's sister was expiated on the scaffold.

Though Elizabeth clung through life to the solitary state of single blessedness, no Princess or Queen—perhaps no woman, ever received more proposals for her hand; and to the last she was surrounded by a host of admirers, who saw on her faded cheeks all the glowing bloom of youth. Such a state of things naturally provoked slander, and afforded ground for continual scandals; and, indeed, some letters lately published, in the *Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton*, by the lamented Sir Harris Nicolas, cast grave and serious imputations on the illustrious name of Elizabeth. But, in the first instance, it was chiefly on Robert Dudley, whom she created Earl of Leicester, and, subsequently, on the chivalrous Earl of Essex, that she bestowed her protection and favour. Her regard for Leicester was so strong, and so openly evinced, that,

at one time, it occasioned real alarm to her ministers; and the cold and cautious Burleigh ventured to make it the subject of a sarcasm. Elizabeth had appointed Leicester to the post of Master of the Horse, when she was informed by the great minister of the nuptials of the Duchess of Suffolk with her equerry, Adrian Stakes. "What!" exclaimed the Queen, "has she married her horsekeeper?" "Yes, your majesty," was the caustic reply, "and she says you would like to do the same." Yet, at this time, Leicester was already married, and his wife, the beautiful and amiable Amy Robsart, rendered immortal by the magic genius of Scott, was kept a prisoner in the country, lest her presence at court should avert from her perjured husband the sunshine of royal favour. A still darker fate awaited her, and there is little doubt that, though made to present the appearance of an accident, the catastrophe which hurried her into eternity was a subtle contrivance of the perfidious and unscrupulous Leicester.

Essex, the favourite of Elizabeth's maturer

years, was first introduced at court by Leicester, whose daughter he had married ; and through his handsome person, and numerous engaging qualities, he speedily took precedence of all competitors. His haughty spirit, indeed, could ill brook the presence of a rival ; and the favour which the royal coquette extended for a time to the gallant Charles Blount, elicited from him so contemptuous a remark, that Blount was provoked into sending him a challenge. This led to a duel in Marylebone Park, in which Essex was slightly wounded, and Elizabeth, who heard of the encounter with extreme displeasure, annoyed at the arrogance and presumption of Essex, declared, with an oath, “it was fitting that some one or other should take the Earl down, and teach him manners ; otherwise there would be no ruling him.”

The impetuous and rash temper of Essex ultimately caused his ruin. Presuming on his great influence with his royal mistress, he lost sight of the fact that she was surrounded, as sovereigns have seldom been,

by able and sagacious ministers, who, by their wise counsels, overruled the mischievous effects that might otherwise have resulted from his ascendancy ; and, emboldened by impunity, he proceeded from one extravagance to another, till, in the end, he treated the Queen with rudeness, contumely, and even violence. On one occasion, Elizabeth was so exasperated by his insolent demeanour, that she actually boxed his ears, on which the imperious Earl, instead of patiently submitting to the correction, turned furiously upon her, half-drew his sword, and swore he would not have taken such a blow from her father. The Lord-Admiral flung himself before his menaced sovereign ; and with difficulty Essex, after calling her “ a King in petticoats,” was persuaded to leave the council-chamber.

Gradually a great change came over Elizabeth : her health began to fail ; her spirits to sink ; and the proceedings of Essex in Ireland, where, much against his inclination, he had been appointed Lord-Deputy, and where he had found everything in

disorder, materially aggravated her depression. Immured in the seclusion of Nonsuch, she heard a report of her own death, which had been very widely circulated, and thus reminded of her mortality, was continually murmuring to herself the ominous words—"dead, but not buried." The misguided conduct of Essex added to her distress and her perplexities; and at last the haughty noble, after attempting to create an insurrection, was brought to trial, convicted of treason, and sentenced to be beheaded.

The poor Queen was now placed in a situation which engages both our sympathy and interest. Resentment, justice, the law, her stern and implacable ministers, demanded with one voice the forfeited life of her favourite; but, while she was thus closely pressed by his enemies, her own heart became his too willing advocate. No sooner was the death-warrant signed than it was recalled, suspended, or cancelled; and, meanwhile, the unhappy Elizabeth, even in affliction a coquette, at one time feigned to be the gayest of the gay, at another sought

no disguise for her crushed and blighted feelings. Eventually the foes of Essex triumphed; he was brought to the block; and his royal mistress, who then yielded up her last tie to the world, was never known to smile again.

In happier days, Elizabeth had given Essex a ring, with an injunction to send it to her, by a safe hand, whenever he stood in need of her protection; and this memento of her affection was actually transmitted to the Countess of Nottingham, for the purpose of being presented to the Queen, but, betraying the trust reposed in her, the Countess never executed the commission. On her death-bed, tormented by remorse, she confessed the treacherous act to Elizabeth, who had come to visit her, and implored the royal pardon; but the ancient fire of the Tudors, still smouldering in those aged veins, was kindled by the intelligence; and, seizing the dying woman by the shoulders, the incensed monarch shook her in her bed, exclaiming "God may pardon you, but I never will!"

Such were the weaknesses, such the faults, of one of the most renowned sovereigns, and most illustrious women, that ever adorned the English throne. However she may be represented, whatever scandal may allege, or testimony almost prove, against her fair fame, Elizabeth occupies a pedestal in history accorded to but few; and England still exults in the Augustan splendour and unsurpassed glory of her reign. The lofty muse of Shakespeare, the immortal wisdom of Bacon, the sagacity of Burleigh, the daring and enterprise of Drake, the undying names of Sydney, Raleigh, and Walsingham, surround this great Princess like a halo, and, by their association, shed additional lustre over her character and life. In a troublous period, under circumstances of unparalleled difficulty, when the nation was divided by rival factions and by rival sects, she grasped the helm of the state with the spirit, if not the hand of a giant, and guided it uninjured through every danger. Her will was supreme; and whether her venerable counsellors assembled to deliberate on her tooth-

ache or to give law to Europe.—whether she was flirting with every comely man in her palace, or majestically reviewing her troops at Tilbury-Fort, she was still the bright particular star, which commanded the homage of every eye. She reduced anarchy and confusion to order, established the reformed religion on a basis which, thank Heaven! has never been overthrown; and herself respected, while she boldly administered the law. Rich and poor, high and low, regarded her with the same devoted, enthusiastic feelings; and the poor wretch condemned to lose his hand, for protesting against the marriage of her highness's grace with "the little French Duke," could still wave his bleeding stump in the air, and cry "God save the Queen!"

Cotemporary with Elizabeth, a female sovereign swayed also the mighty destinies of France. The too-celebrated Catharine de Medicis, daughter of the Duke of Urbino, and niece of Pope Clement VII., was born at Florence in 1519; and in her fifteenth year became the wife of Henry Duke of

Orleans, son of Francis I., and himself destined to wear the Gallic crown. Catharine is described by Moreri as being superior, in mental as well as personal attractions, to every woman of her time; and there can be no doubt that, to extraordinary beauty, she added all the blandishments that Italian craft and great natural gifts could inspire. Her ruling sentiment was dissimulation; and it was conspicuously manifested at every period of her life, by the foulest acts of treachery and murder. She was attached by birth rather than feeling—for she appears to have had no religious principles—to the most ultra section of the Catholic party; but her love of intrigue was so inveterate, that she could remain steadfast to no cause, and was thus continually balancing faction against faction, and veering from one side to the other, till in the end she excited the distrust and detestation of all. Still, she possessed, with many serious defects, rare administrative talents, adequate to the responsibilities she was called upon to undertake; and at times her government was distinguished by

a wise and temperate spirit, apparently as much in advance of herself as of her country and her age.

Her husband succeeded his father, the unfortunate Francis I., by the title of Henry II.; and after ten years of married life, she presented him with his first child, who was followed in quick succession, by nine others, three of whom became Kings, and one a Queen. During this period France was distracted by political and religious dissensions, which, at length, broke forth in civil war; and the household of Catharine was a focus of conspiracy, cabals, and intrigues. The better to carry out her projects, she surrounded herself by a train of complaisant beauties, who were dexterously employed to win, by their arts and blandishments, those incorruptible opponents not to be purchased by gold; and they who could withstand both temptations, were, it is said, removed by poison or the dagger. Her children were reared in the familiar practice of every vice, that they might become an easier prey in after life to her overruling influence, and

their career was marked throughout by the same vile and execrable spirit. During the brief reign of her eldest son Francis II., the husband of the unfortunate Mary Queen of Scots, she contrived to counteract the ascendancy of the Guise party, paving the way for a reconciliation with Henry of Navarre, which, by dint of corruption and intrigue, she accomplished in the succeeding reign, when she exercised the supreme authority in the name of her son Charles. Her imperious spirit, however, could ill brook either the independent tone or the pure faith of the Huguenots, and a desperate quarrel soon ensued, on which both parties flew to arms, and Catharine, burning for revenge, planned and executed the barbarous massacre of St. Bartholomew.

Catharine finally triumphed over the disorders into which her restless spirit of intrigue had plunged the kingdom, and handed it over in a peaceful, if not a prosperous condition, to her son Henry, whom the premature death of his brother called from the barbaric throne of Poland

to receive the sceptre of France. But she was now obliged to abdicate her functions, and had the mortification, in her retirement, after all her scheming and finessing, to see herself succeeded by the hated Guises, the inveterate enemies of her house. Rumour accuses her of having prompted the assassination of the Duke de Guise, accompanied as it was by circumstances of the blackest perfidy; but she declared at the time, with the most solemn asseverations, that she was wholly innocent of the crime. She expired in her seventieth year, in comparative obscurity, universally detested and despised.

Catharine had thought to secure the adhesion of Henry of Navarre, gradually drawn nearer and nearer to the crown, by the hand of her daughter, the beautiful Marguerite; but this weak and profligate princess could exercise no influence on the inconstant mind of Henry; and, indeed, she was too intent on the pursuit of pleasure to lend herself, by any personal act, to the insidious designs of her mother. On

Henry's accession to the throne, her conduct became such an open scandal, that the monarch was compelled to seek a divorce; and she willingly consented to the arrangement, when the death of Gabrielle d'Estrées, by an unlooked-for catastrophe, assured her that she would not be succeeded by a hated rival.

The King was no sooner absolutely liberated, than he engaged himself, under a certain contingency, to marry Mademoiselle d'Entragues, afterwards created Marquise de Verneuil, who had succeeded the fair Gabrielle in his affections. But the wise Sully left him no time to complete so disgraceful a contract; and, while Henry was immersed in the giddy vortex of pleasure, his minister adroitly hurried forward negotiations for the hand of Marie de Medicis, and, after an interval of a few days, Henry learnt, to his surprise, that he was again a husband.

Marie, at the time of her marriage, was in her twenty-fourth year. Her beauty was of the highest Italian cast—dark, soft,

majestic, with eyes of melting lustre, and long, luxuriant, raven tresses. Henry reluctantly quitted the chateau of his favourite to meet the young Queen at Lyons; but two brief days of her society, though relieved by a succession of fêtes and receptions, were sufficient to wear out the love and the patience of the gay monarch, and, deserting his bride, he flew back to the boudoir of his mistress. Such was the first lesson which Marie received of the dissolute temperament of her husband, affording a bitter foretaste of trials and sorrows yet to come." The cruel affront, indeed, which thus met her on the threshold of her new career, was quickly followed by slights still more marked, and every day brought some fresh proof of Henry's undisguised infidelity, insensibility, and indifference. A marriage formed from ambition on one side, and convenience on the other, could hardly be expected to enchain, by its slender ties, a disposition so volatile as Henry's; but, in fact, his excesses were without bounds, and, as regards modern

times, without parallel. The unhappy Queen had scarcely reached Paris, when she was insulted by the presentation of Madame de Verneuil, who had been appointed by the King to a post in her household, and was publicly introduced to the outraged Marie by the Duchess de Nemours, a princess of the blood. Marie, supported by the pride of race and of woman, received the audacious favourite with becoming dignity, though her quivering lip might slightly reveal the wild agitation within. Coldly acknowledging the Marquise's obeisance, she turned to her attendant ladies, and resumed the conversation which this painful incident had interrupted. But Madame de Verneuil, as lost to modesty as to virtue, was not to be so easily repulsed; and she impudently joined in the discourse, addressed herself directly to Marie, and wrung from the surprised Queen the honour of a reply. From this moment her rivalry assumed a more marked, offensive, and undisguised aspect.

In such a court, a young and inexpe-

rienced Queen could assert no authority, and exercise but little influence. Her Italian taste, indeed, exhibiting itself in her toilet, procured for Marie the undisputed sovereignty of the fashions ; but a nature so ambitious and so haughty could not be satisfied with such a narrow dominion. The warm passions of the south urged her into perpetual contests with the King, his parasites, and his mistresses ; and every encounter diminished, instead of extending, her dignity and power. Long impunity had given vice a recognised position at the court of France ; and genius as well as courage—prudence, sagacity, and judgment, were required, more than indignant scorn, to meet its unblushing front. Every class was infected by the same rank corruption, and it was vain to expect shame, when there was no idea of purity. Marie insensibly yielded to despair, and to the fell spirit of the age ; she encouraged her attendants, soon alive to her ruling infirmities, to whisper in her ear the piquant gossip of Henry's mistresses, condescended

to quarrel with those abandoned women, abused them in private, suffered them to meet her in public, and thus degraded herself to their level. By such means the evil became more widely spread and more deeply rooted; a fair name ceased to be valued, because, in this indiscriminate association, it was no longer honoured; and virtue shrank from untarnished rags, when infamy swept by in velvet.

The inconstancy of Henry, which had so often involved him in personal danger, and brought a moral plague on the whole French nation, finally produced, as regards himself, still more fatal effects. His scandalous persecution of the Princess de Condé compelled that beautiful lady to fly, with her insulted husband, to the hostile territory of the Netherlands; and a demand for their surrender being refused by Philip of Spain, Henry, for this frivolous and unworthy cause, determined to plunge his kingdom into a sanguinary war. In the midst of his preparations for the struggle, he received numerous warnings to prepare

for another and more gloomy event. His astrologer, Thomassin, warned him of his approaching end, and, as it is said, predicted not only the day, but the hour of his death. One of his nobles was supernaturally commanded in a vision to announce to him the same awful intelligence. Marie, sleeping by his side, awoke in the night with a piercing cry, and declared that she saw him bleeding beneath the knife of the assassin. But Henry, if he possessed no other quality of a hero, was brave to a fault, and he affected to laugh at these successive warnings, although, in fact, he secretly deemed them prophetic. On the fatal morning, he was reminded by the Duke de Vendôme, his natural son, that the famous astrologer, La Brosse, as well as Thomassin, had pronounced that day to be fraught with danger to his person, and the Duke entreated him to adopt some additional precautions. "La Brosse," cried the reckless monarch, "is an old impostor, who sought to get at your money, and you are a simpleton to believe him. My days can

only be numbered by God." After spending the morning in his cabinet, he entered his carriage, and commanded the obsequious attendants to proceed to the Arsenal, where, intent on forwarding the military armaments, he proposed to visit his great minister Sully, the Grand Master of the Artillery; and as if under the spell of fate, refused to be accompanied by his guards. The messenger of death awaited his approach in a narrow street, connecting the Rue la Feronnerie with that of St. Honoré. Two cumbrous waggons, piled with produce for the market, blocked up the crooked thoroughfare, and the attendants pushed forward, to remove the obstruction, leaving the royal carriage unwatched. The assassin, muffled in a capacious cloak, stole from his recess, raised himself on the wheel of the vehicle, and looked in. Henry was engaged in reading a letter: the deadly knife, thrust through the open window, was unseen; and the next moment it was buried in his heart.

Nothing could exceed the grief of Marie

on hearing of the catastrophe, yet such was the factious spirit of the court that tongues were not wanting, when the first excitement had passed, to accuse her of complicity in the assassination. For this slander history affords not the slightest ground; and there can be no doubt that her sorrow for the King was sincere, though brief — the poisoned sweets of power speedily consoling her for his loss. The station of Regent, to which she had been nominated by Henry himself, opened a wide field for her ambition, and, in some respects, was not unsuited to her brilliant talents; but something more than talent is required for the government of a great nation, and Marie possessed all the arrogance, without the genius of Irene. She had not even the art to secure the affection of her son, who was one day to be her sovereign; and the youthful Louis, while externally treated with every mark of respect, was too often subjected to the discipline of the rod. After one of these ill-advised whippings, Marie, as usual, rising on his appearance, received him with a profound

obedience, when Louis addressed her in words which might have alarmed a more timid mind. "Madam," said he, sternly, "I should be better pleased with a little less curtsying and a little less flogging."

A conspiracy, hatched in Louis' favourite resort, the falconry, by De Luynes, the master of his hawks, a clerk, and a gardener, the monarch's choice companions, terminated the arbitrary reign of Marie, and from being the ruler of France she became a prisoner in the gloomy fortress of Blois. But the fallen Princess was not yet without friends. A plan was arranged for her escape; and in the middle of a dark night she contrived, not without difficulty and pain, to squeeze her now portly person through the window of her closet, and then descended by a rope-ladder to the narrow ramparts. Here, however, both her strength and courage were exhausted, and she declared herself unable to continue the descent to the fosse surrounding the frowning walls of the château. In this dilemma her two attendants wrapped her in a mantle, and hazarded the perilous

feat of lowering her by a rope. She reached the ground in safety, sprung into a carriage which was in waiting, and four fleet horses, impelled by whip and spur, bore her to a secure refuge.

The final ruin of Marie was accomplished by Richelieu, whom she had, in the day of her power, first started on his career of greatness. While Louis the Thirteenth employed his little mind in daubing prints, and his leisure in beating a drum or blowing a horn, the subtle minister, though wielding all the prerogatives of a king, could still feel a nervous jealousy of Marie. His vindictive enmity pursued her in her exile, when, a wanderer and a fugitive, she sought an asylum, first in distracted England, where her daughter shared the throne of Charles, and subsequently in the inhospitable capital of the Netherlands. It was reserved for a poor artist to give a last shelter to the widow of Henry the Fourth, in brighter times his patroness and benefactress, the unhappy mother of France's King and England's Queen. In a small chamber, in an obscure street of

Cologne, in which the glowing genius of Rubens had been ushered into the world, the once fascinating and all-powerful Marie de Medicis—so long surrounded by regal splendours, attended by nobles, and invested with absolute authority—here, on a wretched bed, in a state of destitution, and after she had been reduced to the necessity of burning the miserable furniture in her chamber as fire-wood—the great Marie de Medicis expired, with her latest breath murmuring in prayer the name of her undutiful son.

In the sixteenth century the court of France was, in more than one instance, the cradle of misfortune to Royalty. Here it was that the lovely Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, as wife of the young Dauphin, afterwards Francis the Second, commenced, in the marble halls of Fontainebleau, her chequered course of gaiety and sorrow. From this sunny atmosphere she was transplanted to the chilly north, in the very flower of youth and beauty, though already a widow. Scotland, so long left to the uneasy sway of a regency, was now torn

by factions, distracted by religious discords, and barely preserved from the worst excesses of anarchy. Such a kingdom was a sad heritage for so young, so gentle, so inexperienced, and so brilliant a woman. After sitting at the fairy feet of Marguerite de Valois, and mingling in the gorgeous dissipation of the Louvre, with the *chansons* of Clement Marot, and the courtly lips of De Rohan or Montmorency, ringing out compliments to her unequalled charms, the gay but innocent Mary was immured in the gloomy chambers of Holyrood, menaced on one side by grim, mailed warriors, ready to snatch the sceptre from her hand, and on the other, by rigid and morose puritans, animated by a fiery hatred of her religion, and teaching the stern doctrine that to be cheerful was a weakness, and to smile a sin. It could excite no surprise if, in such a situation, this fair young Queen had been betrayed into some little indiscretions, which the eye of fanaticism, or the unscrupulous tongue of slander, might magnify into guilt; but modern candour is

stunned by the unbounded virulence of her enemies, in imputing to her crimes which surpass belief. Happily these accusations are quite unsupported by facts; and it is no slight vindication of the injured and calumniated Mary, that Elizabeth, at a time when she was treating her with great severity, and consequently was interested in tarnishing her reputation, honestly refused, in reply to a petition from the Countess of Lenox, the mother of Darnley, to investigate charges so improbable and so unfounded. Ultimately the Countess herself was persuaded of Mary's innocence; and became, from that time, the firm and attached friend of her who is accused, by the voice of faction, of murdering her son.

It was after escaping from a long captivity in Lochleven Castle, that the ill-fated Mary, at the head of a hastily-levied army, imprudently ventured on the sanguinary battle of Langside, which ended in her total overthrow, leaving her no alternative but a retreat into England. This was indeed running into the lion's mouth, though, as it

proved, she had less to fear from the jealousy of Elizabeth, than the cabals of her courtiers. Every motive, in fact, conspired to array against her the political and religious prejudices of the ruling statesmen; and Leicester, Burleigh, and Walsingham were equally bent on her ruin. 'Mary was entrapped into a succession of plots, which, while they endangered the peace of the country, excited continual apprehensions in the harassed mind of Elizabeth; both of the misguided Queens were betrayed; and finally Elizabeth yielded a reluctant assent to Mary's execution. This was after she had given utterance to her tortured feelings in those emphatic words—"I swear by the living God, that I would give one of my own arms to be cut off, so that some way could be provided for us both to live in peace." "*Mortua non mordet*," whispered one of her counsellors, who had been despatched by the King of Scots to intercede for Mary's life. "A dead woman cannot bite."

But a darker aspersion is cast upon the

name of Elizabeth, in the letter to Mary's stern gaolers, said to have been written by her command, in which, after a little fencing of words, they are desired to find out some way of "*shortening the life* of the Scots' Queen;" and Secretary Davison accuses his royal mistress of having proposed this foul crime, worthy of the black soul of John, or the blood-stained hand of Richard of Gloucester. But the statements of crafty and guilty ministers must be received with caution, particularly when they are at variance with the obvious complexion of events. The execution of Mary was, after all, effected by stealth—precipitately hurried forward, without the knowledge or the approval of her great rival; and Elizabeth heard of the fatal event with surprise, indignation, and even tears. Mary had died not only as a heroine, but as a Christian, beseeching Heaven to forgive her ruthless and implacable enemies; and it was by the blazing of bonfires, and the merry pealing of bells, that Elizabeth was first apprized of her safety—and her disgrace.

VI.

LATTER DAYS.

THE accession of the Stuarts to the Crown of England opened a new era in our annals ; and their *régime*, extending to the death of Anne, and nominally much later, marks a notable period in the social history of the world. There was a secret understanding with King James, that Lady Scroope, one of the attendants of the bedchamber, should notify the death of Elizabeth to the Scottish monarch by an express messenger, who was to present a blue ring as a pledge of his veracity ; and as the poor Queen was announced to be dying, her ladyship's brother, Sir Robert Carey, held himself in readiness at Richmond Palace, with a strong and fleet

horse, to start at any moment on this momentous errand. Directly Elizabeth expired, the ring was thrown from the window of the royal apartments, the cavalier sprang on his horse, and sixty hours afterwards arrived at Edinburgh, rushed into the King's bedchamber, and saluting him as the sovereign of England, presented the concerted token. "Enough!" cried James. "I know by this ring you are a faithful messenger."

It would be out of the province of this work to enter into an examination of the character of James, except in so far as it was calculated, by its immediate bearing on the courtiers, to influence the manners and the morals of his subjects, and the general tone of society; and there can be no doubt that his habits of drinking and swearing, his coarse buffoonery, and unbecoming encouragement of loose jests, did exercise a most pernicious effect, as well on the manners of women as of men. On the point of drinking, the fact is strongly attested by Sir John Harrington, who, in a letter to Barlow,

the Secretary, says, "Those whom I could never get to taste good English liquors, now follow the fashion, and wallow in drunken delights. The ladies abandon their sobriety, and are seen rolling about in intoxication." Dirt was also a characteristic of the court; and the Countess of Dorset, after paying her devoir at the royal palace of Theobalds, the constant retreat of James, discovered that it had been visited by one of the plagues of Egypt, and brought away a swarm of the odious insects on her garments. The King's love of vulgar jokes found a willing pander in the foremost lady of the court — Mary Villiers, Countess of Buckingham; and she rarely failed to win his puerile applause. Once, indeed, she received a severe reproof, but this was provoked less by her infamous conduct than by the infelicity of her device, which was made to include a pig, an animal so extremely obnoxious to the King, that, in his "Counterblast to Tobacco," he pronounced it to be a suitable dish for the Evil One. The anecdote is related by Wilson, who affirms that the Countess and Bucking-

ham, considering how they should amuse the modern Saul, then suffering from a fit of gloom, ushered into his presence a young damsel, carrying a small pig dressed in long-clothes, to represent an infant, and followed by a servant attired as a bishop, in full canonicals. The pretended prelate, aping the episcopal gravity, began to read the baptismal service from the Prayer-Book, when the revolting proceeding was fortunately interrupted by a squeak from the pig, which at once exposed the trick. James was extremely indignant at this discovery, and turning angrily to the Countess, exclaimed—"What profanation is this? Begone! begone!"

Anne of Denmark, the consort of James, was an amiable, though gay and imprudent princess, causing more than one deed of violence by her thoughtless levity. Her tragic flirtation with the Earl of Murray is commemorated by the old Scottish ballad:—

"O, the bonnie Earl of Murray!
He was the Queen's love!"

Murray was attacked by the Earl of Huntley,

also an admirer of the Queen, and, driven from his castle with his long, silken tresses in flames, was overtaken by his furious rival, who plunged his dagger into his face. "You have marred a better face than your own," was the bitter taunt of the expiring beau, as he fixed his glazed eyes on the assassin. James was suspected of having instigated the murder, as well as that of young Ruthven, who succeeded Murray in the Queen's favour. Ruthven, indeed, was scarcely more prudent than Anne herself, and openly proclaimed his attachment to his royal mistress. But the days of romance had gone by, and the doubting and jealous King repudiated the figment of platonic affection. Walking in the gardens of Falkland palace, he saw the youthful Ruthven lying on the lawn asleep, and on his breast was a ribbon, which the suspicious monarch had that morning presented to the Queen. Beatrice Ruthven, the cavalier's sister, happening to approach at the moment, saw the King's agitation, and as he instantly turned back to the palace, she drew the ribbon from her brother's

neck, and flew with it to Anne. Barely could she retire by a side door from the royal chamber, when the Queen was confronted by James, who, in accents trembling with passion, asked to see the fatal ribbon. It was forthwith produced, and carefully examined. "Evil take me," cried James, "if twain so like be not ^{an} ill mark." Ruthven sealed his misplaced love with his blood, and was cut off, with his noble brother, Lord Gowrie, in the flower of life, a foolish and misguided, but not guilty man.

Arabella Stuart, daughter of the Earl of Lenox, and the King's first cousin, was another victim of the royal distrust. She had privately married Sir William Seymour, afterwards Duke of Somerset, and being committed to the Tower for an alleged misdemeanour, in contracting a marriage without the King's permission, made her escape from the ancient fortress in man's apparel, and set sail for France. Her flight, however, was soon discovered, and she was overtaken; placed under closer and stricter confinement, and finally ended her days a raving maniac.

We must pass by the harrowing crimes of the Countess of Somerset, who, after inspiring the heart and the muse of Sir Philip Sidney in the previous reign, cast such a blot on the annals of James; yet we cannot but remark, as an illustration of the effect of popular manners, the wide difference in the character of the same woman under opposite influences, insomuch that it is difficult to believe that this modern Cisona was indeed the heroine of the *Arcadia*. Nor was she alone in her infamy, which scarcely surpassed that of Lady Lake and her daughter, Lady Rosse, who brought a false and iniquitous charge against their near relative, the innocent and beautiful Countess of Exeter, and audaciously supported it by suborned witnesses, and a forged document, purporting to be the voluntary confession of the Countess. The forgery, however, was discovered by James; and the accusation being disproved, the two noble conspirators were publicly tried for perjury, found guilty, and heavily fined.

One of the most remarkable incidents of

the reign of James was the romantic expedition of Prince Charles to Spain, to sue for the hand of the Infanta, and which, as affording a glance at Spanish manners in relation to a royal lady, may well claim a brief notice in our pages. The Prince left England secretly, and in disguise, accompanied only by Buckingham, and three picked attendants; and after several amusing adventures, arrived safely at Paris, where he announced himself as John Smith, while the more novel designation of *Thomas* Smith was assumed by Buckingham. With the help of false beards and periwigs, they disguised themselves so effectually, that, according to Herbert of Cherbury, the English ambassador, they entirely escaped recognition during their stay in the French capital, although present as spectators at a masqued ball at court, and constantly appearing in public. Narrowly avoiding detention at Bayonne, they preserved their disguise till they reached Madrid, when the celebrated Earl of Bristol made known their arrival to the King; and Charles was in-

stantly awarded a magnificent reception. The Spanish people were as gratified and flattered by his visit as their monarch, and all classes, from the stately grandee to the humble muleteer, united in tendering their guest the most marked demonstrations of respect. Lopez de Vega attuned his lyre in honour of the Prince, whom he represents as declaring himself in the most emphatic manner—

“ Charles Stuart I am,
Love has guided me far ;
To the heaven of Spain—
To Maria my star.”

The Infanta is described as perfectly warranting the enthusiastic love of Charles. Howell, who accompanied his royal master, affirms that she is “a very comely lady, rather of a Flemish complexion than Spanish, fair haired, and carries a most pure mixture of red and white in her face.” But in the first instance, her princely lover was only permitted to view her at a distance, as Spanish etiquette, then even more rigid than now, forbade their associating, till a formal dispensation from the Pope had authorized

and sanctioned their union. Still Ferdinand politely contrived that he should obtain a sight of the Infanta, on the first Sunday after his arrival; and it was arranged between them that the whole royal family, including the youthful Princess, should appear on the Prado, in the King's coach, while Charles rode incognito in the carriage of one of the courtiers. Everything went off as agreeably as could be expected on such an occasion. "The Infanta," says Howell, describing the scene, "sat in the boot [of the coach], with a blue ribbon about her arm, on purpose that the Prince might distinguish her: there were about twenty coaches besides, of grandees, nobles, and ladies, that attended the party. As soon as the Infanta saw the Prince, her colour rose very high."

But this mode of courtship, however consistent with the antique usages of Madrid, did not satisfy the romantic ardour of Charles; and being informed that the Infanta was in the habit of spending the morning at a pleasant suburban chateau, a few

miles from the capital, he ventured on the bold measure of repairing to this retreat, and laying wait for her in the gardens. After some time, he heard her voice in an adjacent orchard, the entrance to which, as it was the most private part of the grounds, was secured by a double door, absolutely groaning with fastenings. But it is well known that love laughs at locksmiths; and Charles, unwilling to be baffled, managed to scale the wall, and jumping from the top, alighted at the feet of his astonished mistress. The Infanta, whether from joy or surprise, saluted the apparition with a scream, which brought up an old tutelary Marquis, who, sinking on his knee, besought the royal lover to retire, as his intrusion might cost him his head. Such an appeal could not be resisted by the good-natured Prince, and he reluctantly withdrew, not, we may believe, without exchanging a tender glance with the Princess. Afterwards he was permitted to address her, but, from political causes, the match was ultimately broken off; and Charles, returning

to England, became the husband of the beautiful and unfortunate Henrietta Maria. He was now quickly plunged into other transactions, and a storm burst over Europe, which shook society to its depths.

The events of this troublous period were greatly influenced by the character and personal feelings of an English Princess—Elizabeth, sister of Charles, eldest daughter of James I., and latterly Queen of Bohemia, who, as the prime mover of the incidents which led to the sanguinary 'Thirty Years' War in Germany, involving a struggle between all the chief powers of Europe, and which, by developing and fostering the fiery zeal of the Puritans, sowed the seeds of the Great Rebellion in England, may be said to have set the world in flames.

The heroine of this great historic drama was neither cruel nor arrogant, but, on the contrary, gentle and humane, moderate in her ambition, an affectionate sister, a loving and dutiful wife, a fond mother, and a devoted friend. Caught up, as it were, by a political whirlwind, and impelled along by

the force of events, she acted less from choice than necessity, and was always swayed by the noblest and most pious sentiments. Her beauty and early virtues were the theme of universal admiration, even before she reached the age of womanhood ; and, among others, Ben Jonson, in a laudatory poem, complimented her royal parents on her endowments, in a spirit almost prophetic—

“ Nor shall less joy your regal hopes pursue
In that most princely maid, whose form might call
The world to war, and make it hazard all
Its valour for her beauty ; she shall be
Mother of nations.”

The world was indeed called to war by her voice, and, as the mother of nations, her august descendants still occupy the thrones of England and Hanover.

Elizabeth was born in the far North, in the ancient palace of Falkland, on the 16th August 1596 ; and a humble Scotchwoman, bearing the unpoetic name of Bessie Macdowall, had the honour of rearing the future parent of England's sovereigns. After the union of the two crowns, numerous proposals

were made for her hand, and she narrowly escaped the misery of both a French and Spanish alliance, being, at length, bestowed, in her seventeenth year, on Frederic V., Prince Palatine of the Rhine. The Prince, though handsome, gallant, and accomplished, so that he might boldly aspire to the love and favour of any lady, had not ventured to present himself at the English court as a suitor without much previous preparation; and a letter is still extant, in which he requests the Duke of Wurtemburgh, his friend and ally, to lend him the services of his dancing-master, that he may place himself under his effective tutelage. He had the good fortune to win the heart, as well as the hand of Elizabeth, to whom he was publicly betrothed in the December of 1612; but, owing to the melancholy death of her brother, Prince Henry, the beloved companion of her infancy and youth, the marriage was not actually solemnized till the following February, when, after being three times asked in church, the royal pair were happily united.

The Princess, on proceeding to Germany, took up her residence at the stately castle of Heidelberg, but occasionally retired to the pleasant shades of Fredericsthal, where she spent her time in the masculine exercises of shooting and the chase. These indeed were her favourite diversions, and she delighted to roam through the forest with her gun, or in eager pursuit of the wild boar. Her fame as a sportswoman spread through Germany, and she was complimented with the flattering title of “the Diana of the Rhine;” but this brief career of enjoyment was interrupted by maternal cares, too soon followed by vicissitudes, not more fatal to her consort and herself than to her adopted country.

The imperial throne was at this time occupied by Matthias of Hapsburg, who, himself childless, wished, in his old age, to preserve the elective sceptre of Bohemia as the inalienable inheritance of a collateral branch of his house, represented by Ferdinand of Austria; and, with this view, installed Ferdinand as titular King, with

a positive stipulation that he was not to exercise the sovereign authority during his life. But Ferdinand was not to be restrained by such an engagement, and, a Roman Catholic and a bigot, he had no sooner obtained the crown, than he commenced a furious persecution of his Protestant subjects; and, after repeated outrages, compelled them, in self-defence, to take up arms. In several conflicts, victory fell to the insurgents, while their cause began to excite the deepest interest and sympathy throughout Germany, and at this critical moment Matthias died, leaving the empire without a head. The Protestant Princes, fortified by an alliance with the States of Holland, and the dubious support of James I., now associated for mutual defence; and the accession of the bigoted Ferdinand to the imperial dignity seemed indeed to threaten both their liberties and their existence. Bohemia threw down the gage of battle, by electing Frederic, the husband of the Princess Elizabeth, to her vacant throne, and, at the same time,

Hungary also revolted from Ferdinand, and bestowed the regal diadem on Bethlehem Gabor, Prince of Transylvania.

King James was very averse to the acceptance of the Bohemian sceptre by his youthful son-in-law ; but Frederic, not unwilling to be a monarch, was easily persuaded by Elizabeth to follow the thorny path of ambition, and, in company with the Princess, repaired to Prague, where they were solemnly invested with the crown. Spinola, with the combined imperial forces, was already in motion to attack him ; and as Frederic returned no answer to reiterated appeals for his submission, gradually drew nearer, and finally entered the Bohemian territories. In this alarming posture of affairs, Elizabeth, again on the point of becoming a mother, was urged to quit the dangerous vicinity of Prague, and seek a more secure residence, as the imperialists had already earned an unenviable reputation for brutality and ferocity, and, if made prisoner, she might incur personal peril. But the brave Queen steadily refused

to leave her husband, and at such a moment, Frederic felt only too much in need of her presence and her counsel. His army, threatened on its flank by Spinola, was hastily withdrawn from the frontier to cover the capital; but while he flew to pass a few moments with the Queen, the enemy fell on his disordered battalions, and thus precipitated the memorable battle of Prague. At the first news of the action, Frederic sprang on his horse and was spurring in all haste to the field, when he was met at the city gate by Count Anhalt, who, in breathless accents, informed him that all was lost. Nothing now remained but flight; and the poor Queen, at a time when she most needed attendance and repose, was hurried from the palace, and obliged to undertake a long, arduous, and perilous journey, partly performed on horseback, behind one of her servants, a young English yeoman, who overcame every difficulty, and ultimately placed her in safety within the walls of Breslau.

Her husband's affairs were not yet des-

perate, and the brave Count Mansfeldt, whose own life was a romance, remained faithful to his cause, while the chivalrous Christian of Brunswick was wholly devoted to the Queen. The attachment of Christian to Elizabeth was as sincere as it was romantic, and as honourable as sincere. Instead of a plume, his burnished helmet was adorned with her glove, while his motto—“*Fur Gott und fur sie*”—“for God and for her,” really breathed the sentiment and the language of his honest, noble heart. Nor was he singular in this feeling, which was shared, with equal constancy, if not equal ardour, by a young English nobleman, the celebrated Earl Craven, who so often distinguished himself in her service. But the mad Brunswicker, as Christian, from his reckless bravery, was called, proclaimed her name at the cannon’s mouth, and after losing his arm at the side of Mansfeldt, in a severe action with the combined Spanish and imperial army, he sent a messenger to inform Elizabeth that he had still an arm left to fight, and a life to lose in her cause.

Death, however, in an evil hour, deprived her of the support both of Christian and Mansfeldt; and the pusillanimity, double-dealing, and treachery of her father materially augmented and aggravated her misfortunes. Forbidden to return to England, she found a humble refuge at the Hague, where, with her husband, she was often reduced to extreme pecuniary distress, only relieved, at long intervals, by the niggard hand of King James, and a small annual allowance from the States of Holland. But Europe still possessed a knight who could sympathise with the injured and oppressed, and the renowned Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, buckled on his armour in behalf of Protestant Germany and the beautiful Elizabeth of Bohemia. In an incredibly short time he completely paralyzed the power of the imperialists, recovered the palatinate, and restored the hereditary authority of Frederic. But his career of glory was abruptly terminated, and the Swedes purchased the sanguinary victory of Lutzen with the life of their King. Frederic,

now deprived of his last friend, was himself struck down by the plague, and expired in the prime of manhood, in November, 1632.

The public career of Elizabeth, though it was restricted, was not closed by the death of her husband, and in her sombre retreat at the Hague, she continued to exert herself in the name and the interest of her children. But her two sons speedily became unmanageable, and while Charles Louis, the eldest, assumed the direction of his own affairs, Rupert carried his reckless sword to the camp of Charles I., and acquired a memorable name in England. Elizabeth lived to see the restoration of her nephew, Charles II., when she returned to her native land, and, in 1661, ended her chequered life at Leicester House, the residence of her devoted adherent, Lord Craven, to whom she was said to have been privately married.

Several illustrious women figure in the dark annals of the English civil war, and the heroic Countess of Derby, who resisted to the last the haughty power of Cromwell,

and the gentle Countess of Sunderland, may be numbered among the foremost. Lady Fanshawe and kindly Lucy Hutchinson have themselves written the stirring tale of their own lives, with a grace and feminine truthfulness rarely equalled ; and the famous Marchioness, more famous as the Duchess, of Newcastle, who was prouder of her small literary honours than of the highest dignities of the peerage, has left behind her a name that will never be forgotten. Lucy, Countess of Carlisle, played a more prominent, though not so creditable a part, in the great political events of the time ; and as the friend and *confidante* first of Strafford, and then of Pym, was now associated with the extreme royal, and now with the ultra-republican party, ending by denouncing both. As if to sustain in death the vanity of her life, she expired at her toilet, while preparing to pay a visit of ceremony to her early and often betrayed friend, Queen Henrietta Maria.

A still stranger fate befell the lovely Venetia Stanley, whom poetry and romance, combining with the malicious scandal of the day, have raised to the dignity of a heroine. This celebrated beauty was the daughter of Sir Edward Stanley of Tortgue Castle, and passed her early years at Euston Park in Oxfordshire, where she had for her constant companion the son of a neighbour, afterwards the famous Sir Kenelm Digby ; and the two children, it is said, now contracted for each other that ardent attachment which remained the passion of their lives. Even in childhood, Venetia's charms were the theme of universal admiration, and, as she approached womanhood, she was accounted a miracle of grace and beauty. Aubrey, by no means one of her friends, has preserved a glowing description of her appearance. "She had," he says, "a most lovely sweet round face, delicate dark brown hair dark brown eyebrows, about which was much sweetness, as also in the opening of

her eyelids. 'The colour of her cheeks was that of the damask rose.' A belle so captivating could not be approached without danger, and her arrival in town excited such a commotion among the beaux, that a court wag wrote over the door of her lodging the following friendly caution :—

—“ Pray come not near,
For Dame Venetia Stanley lodges here.”

A suspicious acquaintance with the Earl of Dorset has left a blemish on this part of Venetia's life ; and she is accused of having coquetted also with another nobleman, whose name is masked by Sir Kenelm Digby, under the inscrutable designation of Ursatino. The latter proceeding, if we are to believe the narrative of the lady's credulous husband, was attended by an incident very characteristic of the time. Venetia received a letter, requesting her to give a private meeting to Sir Kenelm, at a somewhat secluded spot, where they were not likely to be observed ; and on her way

thither she was waylaid by five armed horsemen, who, presenting their naked poniards, threatened to kill her if she raised an outcry; then taking possession of the carriage, they carried her off to a lonely country-house, where she found herself in the power of Ursatino. Her courage, however, remained unshaken; and in the dead hour of the night, she noiselessly raised the window of her chamber, tied the sheets of her bed together, and let herself down to the ground. In escaping to the road, she was encountered by a wolf, and was in danger of being torn in pieces, when her loud cries, as she still flew along, brought to her assistance a young nobleman, who fortunately happened to be passing, and by whom she was conducted to a neighbouring mansion, belonging to a female relation. But the errors or the misfortunes of Venetia were more than counterbalanced, in the eyes of a grateful lover, by her unbounded generosity; and Sir Kenelm was indebted to his

munificent mistress for the means of defraying his expensive journey to France, on the occasion of his being appointed one of the escort of Henrietta Maria. At this time, he was her accepted suitor, and they were soon united by the endearing tie of marriage.

It might be thought that Sir Kenelm Digby would now be content; but a philosopher and chemist, as well as a doting husband, he wished to preserve unimpaired, if not to increase, the dazzling charms of his wife; and, with this view, was continually presenting her with some new cosmetic, or carefully-prepared dish, intended to produce the desired effect. Macbeth's witches could hardly have devised more odious or more noxious compounds; and the poor lady was feasted on such doubtful delicacies as capons fed with snakes, and wine distilled from vipers. At last, she was induced to swallow a venomous powder, which was to have the singular effect of making her madly in love

with her husband; and, in the morning, she was found dead on her pillow, her head lying on her hand, as if she were still in a gentle slumber.

Such were some of the strange delusions of the age, encouraged and shared by men of the highest intellect, and the noblest attainments. Among the vulgar, they took another form, and broke forth, under the impulse of King James's essay on Demonology, in a furious crusade against witchcraft. In course of time, every aged woman whom infirmity or failing years rendered cross and fretful, ran the risk of being considered a witch, and, as such, might be brought to trial, and, on the slightest evidence, condemned and burnt. After an interval of two centuries, the blood boils at the tragic recital of this cruel and diabolical assize, which can only be paralleled by the great religious persecutions of Nero and Domitian. Hundreds of innocent women were accused of holding communica-

tion with the Evil One, brought to a mock trial, subjected to a barbarous and inhuman ordeal, and, in almost every instance, sentenced to be burnt. One mode of ascertaining their guilt was by lacerating their bodies with pins, three inches long; another, practised by the great witch-finder Hopkins, was that recommended by King James, in his notable essay,—namely, laying the suspected witch full length in a pond, stitched in a blanket, when if innocent she would sink and be drowned, but if guilty she would float, and then was adjudged to the stake. Many parishes appointed a witch-pricker as a regular local functionary, just as they did a sexton or a constable; and the office was one of no small entolument. But we can excuse the superstition of the vulgar, when we find the virtuous and estimable Sir Matthew Hale, as if suddenly transformed into a Bonner or a Jeffreys, finding two poor old women guilty of this imaginary crime, and pronouncing upon them the awful sen-

tence of the law. Gradually this great delusion expired; but an aged dame was burnt as a witch so late as the reign of Queen Anne.

The Restoration, breaking the iron yoke of the Puritans, left the English people, wearied and disgusted by their long thralldom, at liberty to indulge unrestrained in every vice and every excess. A court steeped in the lees of Continental depravity too readily led the way, infecting every class, to the humblest individual, with the same foul taint, so that the hideous moral leprosy sapped and blurred the whole fabric of society. 'The King's union with a virtuous and innocent princess, the unfortunate Catharine of Braganza, opposed no check to the headlong and overwhelming tide of profligacy and corruption. Catharine herself was insulted by the presentation of her husband's favourite at her first court; and so indignant did she feel at the outrage, that, after a vain effort to repress her feelings,

the blood gushed from her nose and mouth, and she was carried from the gorgeous saloon insensible. Yet, in a little time, she was not only brought to tolerate the presence and the society of Lady Castlemaine, but even joined in the same dance with the equally infamous Duchess of Portsmouth, a French beauty, whom Louis XIV., more in the style of an Asiatic despot than a Christian King, had presented to Charles, through the ill-chosen medium of Henrietta of Orleans, his own sister. And a period came, when her regal honours had sunk so low, that the unprincipled Buckingham, ever ready for any villany, had the audacity to propose to Charles to carry her off to America, in order to afford him a pretext for a divorce—a proposal which the weak monarch, bad as he had become, still had the manliness to reject, though not the dignity to resent.

Virtue was now held so cheap, that it was constantly made the subject of lampoons

and pasquinades, and women of all ranks, and of all ages, sat in the public theatre, with their unabashed faces prudently covered by masks, to hear and applaud the most odious imputations on their modesty, their character, and their sex. Religion was a byword, or a party cry, never referred to but in mockery, or for the detestable purpose of pitting man against his brother; and drinking, betting, gaming, flirtations, and intrigues, pursued openly, in the face of day, and in utter disregard of observation, were the ordinary occupations of women of every sphere. In the highest circles, vice was so unblushingly practised, that the Countess of Shrewsbury, after being convicted of numerous irregularities, did not scruple to attend Buckingham in a duel with the dishonoured Earl, and, disguised as a page, meekly held the horse of her lover, while he ran his sword through her husband. Amiable exceptions, indeed, there were, to the

general demoralization, and among these, the honoured names of Mrs. Godolphin and Mary Evelyn shone pre-eminent, and still claim our sympathy, our respect, and our veneration.

Count Hamilton has left us, in his amusing Memoirs of De Grammont, a too faithful picture of the manners and usages of the court, and its daily derelictions, forcibly representing the general tone of the age. This may draw a feeble illustration from a morning's adventure of a lady who afterwards became his own wife, but who at the time was Maid of Honour to the Duchess of York, and distinguished by the flattering appellation of La Belle Jennings. It happened that the notorious Earl of Rochester, having fallen into disgrace at Court, had, in one of his mad fits, disguised himself as a German doctor, and, taking a lodging in an obscure part of the town, set up as an astrologer. All the town was soon seized with a vehement desire to consult this oracle of

fate, and Miss Jennings, though a very prudent young damsel, as Maids of Honour always are, naturally shared the universal infatuation, being at the moment particularly anxious to know why a certain person, who should be nameless, did not propose to an exceedingly handsome lady, with whom he appeared to be desperately in love, and who was willing to give him all reasonable encouragement. She imparted her secret wish to Miss Price, the indulgent mistress of the Maids; and it was arranged, after a long consultation, that they should visit the magician together, disguised as orange-girls, and so gratify their curiosity without revealing their station. Accordingly, one fine morning they started *in a hackney coach*, each furnished with a basket of oranges, the better to sustain her assumed character; and they had made some progress, when, approaching the Theatre Royal, where the Duchess of York was then witnessing the performance, a malignant spirit suggested to

the foolish Miss Price that it would be an unrivalled feat to enter the playhouse, and sell their oranges directly in front of the Royal box. Miss Jennings indiscreetly agreed, and alighting, they made their way to the door, just as Sydney and Killigrew, two of the greatest lady-killers of the day, were directing their steps to the same point. The fair Price instantly accosted Sydney; but that great beau, dressed for conquest, was too intent on other thoughts to notice either the humble street beauty or her oranges. Not so Killigrew, whose quick eye was at once struck and captivated by their appearance, and while he pretended to scrutinize Price's basket, he politely chucked Jennings under the chin. The Maid of Honour fired at such a salutation, and, quite forgetting her oranges, asked him how he presumed, how he dared, to offer her so great an affront! "Ha! ha!" cried Killigrew, "here's a rarity, indeed!" But, before he could proceed further, Price, fearing

discovery, dragged her indignant companion away.

Taking another coach, they now resumed their journey to the astrologer's, and, at length, reached the end of the squalid street in which he lodged. Here they alighted, and leaving their oranges in the coach, resolved, in order to avert suspicion, to proceed to the magician's door on foot. But as evil fortune would have it, they were at this moment confronted by another ruffling courtier, the gay Lord Brouncker, who had been attracted by the strange spectacle of two orange-girls in a hackney coach, and now dashed in between them. In vain they turned away their heads; Brouncker, determined to have a nearer view of their faces, and restrained by no scruples, dodged from side to side, and from one to the other, till, accomplishing his object, he recognised them both. This, however, he took care to conceal, while he assailed them with the coarsest sarcasms and abuse; and with difficulty

they escaped back to the coach, which, to their dismay, they found surrounded by a mob of boys, who had made a desperate rush at their oranges, and the sturdy coachman, emulating the spirit of the days of chivalry, was so bent on defending his charge, that it required all their united eloquence to prevail upon him to throw the worthless fruit into the middle of the street, and make the best of his way off with themselves.

But we can hardly blame the little follies of Maids of Honour, when, on one occasion, the Queen herself was guilty of a similar frolic. Lord Braybrooke, in his interesting *History of Audley-End*, has preserved an amusing account of this adventure, which occurred at Saffron Walden, in Essex. It appears that a fair was held at that dismal old hole, while her majesty was staying at the neighbouring mansion of Audley-End, then a royal palace; and Catharine, no doubt prompted by others, determined to

visit it in disguise. The Duchess of Buckingham and the lovely Duchess of Richmond readily entered into her design, and they started from the palace together, dressed as country lasses, and each mounted on a cart-horse, behind a gay cavalier, transformed into a bumpkin. Henshaw, who was probably a spectator of the strange cavalcade, describes the progress of the party with inimitable felicity. "They had all so overdone it in their disguise," says this worthy man, "and looked so much more like antiques than country folk, that as soon as they came to the fair the people began to go after them ; but the Queen going to a booth to buy a pair of yellow stockings for her sweetheart, and Sir Bernard Gascoigne asking for a pair of gloves streaked with blue, for his sweetheart, they were soon by their gibberish found to be strangers, which drew a bigger flock about them. One amongst them had seen the Queen at a dinner, knew her, and was proud of her knowledge ; this soon

brought all the fair into a crowd to stare at the Queen. Being thus discovered, they as soon as they could got to their horses; but as many of the fair as had horses got up with their wives, children, sweethearts, or neighbours behind them to get as much gape as they could till they brought them to the court-gate. Thus, by ill conduct, was a merry frolic turned into a penance."

But such incidents, though they illustrate the loose spirit, fail to convey an idea of the license of the time, which pervaded the whole nation, and shed its baneful influence alike on high and low, rich and poor. Its real extent can only be gathered from the minute entries of Pepys, who, alas! grave Secretary though he was, was himself but mortal, and often indulged in a little—let us hope, innocent—flirtation, even at church. Here is an instance of his weakness on the memorable afternoon of Sunday the 18th of August 1667.—“I walked towards Whitehall, but being wearied, walked into St. Dunstan’s

Church, where I heard an able sermon of the minister of the place, and stood by a pretty modest maid, whom I did labour to take by the hand ; but she would not, but got further and further from me ; and, at last, I could perceive her to take pins out of her pocket to prick me if I should touch her again—which, seeing, I did forbear, and was glad I did spy her design. And then I fell to gaze upon another pretty maid, in a pew close to me, and she on me, and I did go about to take her by the hand, which she suffered a little, and then withdrew.”

So great was the dissoluteness of the age, that the three visitations of war, fire, and pestilence, the heaviest scourges of the human race, which successively fell on the land, seem, even at this distance of time, like the wrathful judgments of Heaven, specially inflicted on a wicked people. Yet amidst the universal demoralization, the kindly elevating influence of woman was not entirely absent, and De Foe mentions,

in his awful narrative, the tender devotion of a young girl to her lover, who had been smitten with the plague, and whom, regardless of herself, she attended and nursed in his extremity, bringing him successfully through the attack. Her assiduous care entailed the fearful penalty of infection and scarcely was her lover restored, when the fatal spots appeared on her own pale face, and she had to look for help to him. He proved equally grateful and successful; and the loving pair survived, as they deserved, to unite their fortunes by a more sacred, though, in their case, it could hardly be a more endearing tie.

In France, the long reign of Louis XIV. produced no real improvement in the national manners, and the condition of woman became, if possible, still more degraded. During his younger days, the Grande Monarque had even exceeded the licence of Charles II., and the vices of the English court were, after all, but a coarse imitation

of the splendid depravity of Versailles. In his later years, Louis fell into the hands of his confessors, who, mistaking remorse for piety, endeavoured to mould him into a saint; and, by their advice, he is said to have privately married the widow of Scarron, whom he created Marchioness de Maintenon, and who was the last arbitress of his court. But this union was never publicly recognised; and, consequently, could have no effect on society, which, indeed, had become so thoroughly debased, that it treated with ridicule, as mere idle forms, the most sacred restraints of morality and religion. The same tone marked the inglorious reign of Louis XV., which heralded the catastrophe of the French Revolution, when they who had sowed the storm, reaped the whirlwind.

Ward, in his *London Spy*, and Walpole in his letters, have graphically delineated the manners of their time during the intervening generations, embracing the long *régime* of black patches, hoops, and monster

bonnets. The low moral condition of women of rank is vividly represented in the novels of Fielding and the curt poems of Swift; and Lady Mary Montague, in her "Town Eclogue," gives a diverting account of the frivolous pursuits of these leaders of fashion. A noble lady's shopping is thus described :—

"Straight then I'll dress and take my wonted range,
Through Indian shops, to Motteux's, or the Change,
Where the tall jar erects its stately pride
With antic shapes in China's azure dyed.
There, careless lies a rich brocade unroll'd,
Here shines a cabinet with burnish'd gold.
But then, alas! I must be forc'd to pay,
And bring no penn'orths', nor a fan away."

The "Indian houses," mentioned by the fair poetess, were, according to other accounts, not altogether such innocent places of resort; and the woman of quality, whose tall black footman assisted her to alight from a sumptuous chariot, often came to the oriental mart to meet a lover, or make an assignation. Raffles, lotteries, and auctions, with a drive or promenade on the Mall, occupied

the rest of the day, which began at noon, and, long after midnight, terminated in the glaring shades of Ranelagh or Vauxhall.

Pope alludes to the prevalent custom of late rising in describing the chamber of Belinda—

“Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,
And op’d those eyes that must eclipse the day.
Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake,
And sleepless lovers just at twelve awake.
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock’d the ground,
And the press’d watch return’d a silver sound.
Belinda *still* her downy pillow press’d.”

The same brilliant muse has afforded us a partial glimpse of the fair Belinda’s toilet—

“And now unveil’d the toilet stands display’d,
Each silver vase in mystic order laid.

* * * * *

This casket India’s glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box :
The tortoise here and elephant unite,
Transform’d to combs, the speckl’d and the white ;
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billet-doux.”

A period so fruitful of social infirmity yet gave to the world some memorable women, eminent for their talents, their career, or their virtues. Romance still boasts of the

devoted attachment of Flora Macdonald for the misguided Pretender; and the famous Duchess of Marlborough has found a niche in the granite temple of history. In contrast with her great fortunes, her sister, the lovely Duchess of Tyrconnell, fell into the most abject poverty, and is supposed to have obtained a scanty subsistence in her old age by keeping a stall at the Exchange. while, on the other hand, Anne Clarges, the wife, or, as some say, the mistress of a private soldier, was raised to the highest rank as Duchess of Albemarle.

But a still more memorable example of those favoured few whose lot it is to have greatness thrust upon them, is afforded by the Empress Catharine of Russia, consort of Peter the Great. Born at an obscure village, near Dorpt, in Livonia, the natural daughter of a poor country girl, Catharine never knew who was her father. When only three years old, the sudden death of her mother left her an orphan, and, about

the same time, she was deprived of her generous protector, Count Rosen, on whose estate she was born, and who, by kindly admitting her into his house, had preserved her from perishing. Her destitute condition excited the sympathy and compassion of a pious Lutheran minister, named Glack, residing at the neighbouring town of Marienburg, and he received her into his family, and, as she grew older, employed her to attend on his children. In this situation she remained till her eighteenth year, when she married a bold dragoon, one of the Swedish garrison of the town, who had stormed and carried the weak fortress of her heart; but it is said that just as the marriage-ceremony was concluded, the unlucky bridegroom was marched off with a detachment to Riga, without being able to take leave of his bride, though others assert, with equal confidence, that he did not quit the town till eight days after his nuptials. Be this as it may, he was absent from Marienburg when

it surrendered to the Russians, and he was destined never to meet Catharine again. The widowed bride, as she might now be considered, fell into the hands of the victors, and was taken under the protection of General Bauer, residing in his quarters in the ostensible capacity of his housekeeper. Here her extraordinary beauty attracted numerous admirers, and among others, the celebrated Menschikoff, who, from selling pies in the streets of St. Petersburg, had been raised by Peter the Great to the highest posts in the empire, and now enjoyed the rank of Prince.

At the period of her first acquaintance with this personage, Catharine was remarkable for the brilliant purity of her complexion, to which her full dark eyes, ever beaming with tenderness, gave a peculiar effect, mantling her in an atmosphere of light; and her long flaxen tresses were dyed raven black to add the charm of contrast. Her figure was slight, but faultless; her movements were

marked by a natural grace, which no art could equal; and her demeanour, kind and affable to all, exhibited a rare combination of modesty, dignity, and ease. She could neither read nor write, yet such was the force of her understanding, that she was found capable of conducting the most important affairs in the greatest exigencies; and always expressed herself with fluency, eloquence, and point. Menschikoff soon snatched this dazzling prize from the veteran Bauer; and she remained under his roof till, on an eventful morning, in her twenty-first year, she was seen by his imperial master, and then the poor serf-girl again changed hands, and passed to the palace of the Czar. From this moment she became so indispensable to Peter, that he made her his companion in all his expeditions, and she cheerfully shared the hardships and the dangers of his successive campaigns. The sweetness of her temper, the unfailing kind-

ness of her heart, her gentleness, docility, and vivacity, won more and more upon him ; and his hereditary melancholy and even his madness vanished under the influence of her presence. As we have lately seen the fierce lion tamed by a young girl, so this wild man was subdued and softened by the mild Catharine ; and so much was he under her • control, that his orders for the execution of great criminals were always given secretly, lest he should be induced, by her intercession, to grant a pardon. At length, he privately conferred upon her the name, though not the honours of a wife, which satisfied her heart, though it did not improve her position. But fortune had reserved for her a destiny still more brilliant. In the campaign against the Turks, in 1711, the reckless impetuosity of Peter involved his army in a most perilous situation, from which extrication seemed impossible, and, seized with one of his gloomy fits, he shut

himself up in his tent to await the issue, giving orders that he should on no account be disturbed. Catharine then ventured on the bold step of acting in his name, without his knowledge, and dexterously concluded a most advantageous treaty with the Turks, which effected the deliverance of both the Emperor and the army. Peter was overjoyed at the result ; and, in his admiration of her talents, publicly acknowledged her as his wife, carried her in triumph to Moscow, and himself placed on her head the imperial diadem.

Catharine's manners and address in this exalted station, instead of exciting criticism and ridicule, as her low origin might have led us to expect, captivated both rich and poor ; but her personal conduct was not altogether so irreproachable, and she is said to have entertained too strong a predilection for the society of her chamberlain. It appears that they held stolen interviews, and on one occasion,

Peter surprised them together in a secluded arbour, in the private gardens of the palace, while the chamberlain's sister, Madame Balcke, with a favourite page, was lingering near the spot, as if to guard against intrusion. Peter was so infuriated, that he struck Catharine over the shoulders with his cane, and then left the place, without saying a word. Mons, whose indiscretion or presumption could not be forgiven, was arrested, accused of bribery and embezzlement, and, after a formal trial, brought to the block. Madame Balcke was punished with ten strokes of the knout, and banishment to Siberia: and the unfortunate page, though the son of a nobleman, was condemned to serve as a private soldier, and despatched to a distant and unhealthy station. Catharine herself narrowly escaped the imperial vengeance. As soon as Mons was beheaded, she was taken in a carriage beneath a gibbet, surmounted by the chamberlain's head, and

Peter, sitting at her side, eagerly watched the effect of the spectacle. But she preserved her composure, and merely exclaimed in a tone of indifference — “What a pity that courtiers are so corrupt !”

Peter did not long survive ‘this’ tragic incident ; and as he expired rather suddenly, it was thought that his death was precipitated by poison, administered by the hand of Catharine. The conjecture, however, is wholly unsupported by evidence ; and, indeed, is at variance with the character and habits of the Empress, as well as all the known facts. It may easily be traced to the malice of her enemies, who vehemently opposed her retention of power ; but, by the aid of Menschikoff, and her own resolution and judgment, she seized the reins of government, and succeeded in maintaining her authority. She still remained the beneficent mistress of her people, ever exerting herself to modify and improve the condition of the

lower classes; and particularly to abolish the barbarous custom of capital punishment, so fearfully prevalent in preceding reigns; but, in private life, she indulged in lamentable excesses, drinking quantities of Tokay wine and ardent spirits, and passing whole nights in the open air. A virulent cancer, which the rude skill of the time and country was unable to cure, became fatal under such continued dissipation, and carried her off in the thirty-ninth year of her age, and the second of her reign.

- In the next generation, Germany produced an Empress who rivalled Catharine in her great natural capacity, in her personal beauty, and in her singular good fortune, but who was happier in preserving an irreproachable and spotless name. Maria Theresa, the celebrated Empress-Queen of Germany and Hungary, was the daughter of Charles VI., and was born at Vienna, in 1717. At the age of nineteen, she became

the consort of Francis, Grand Duke of Tuscany, a prince to whom she was tenderly attached, and who, on the death of her father, inherited with her the extensive territories of the house of Austria. But, although her rights were guaranteed by solemn treaties, she had no sooner assumed the sovereign authority, than claims were advanced on all sides to different portions of her hereditary dominions, and, at the same time, the French party bestowed the imperial diadem on the Elector of Bavaria, and the renowned Frederic of Prussia seized the important province of Silesia. But pitted against this potent adversary, assailed on one side by the Elector of Bavaria, in conjunction with the mighty hosts of France, and, on the other, by the Elector of Saxony and the King of Poland, the great Empress-Queen maintained her cause with unshaken courage, firmness, and majesty. Summoning the states of the kingdom to meet her at Pres-

burg, she presented herself, with her infant son in her arms, in the midst of her nobles, and delivered an address so eloquent and touching, that the whole assembly drew their swords, and solemnly dedicated their lives to her service. An army was promptly raised, and succeeded in relieving the beleaguered city of Vienna, though, from the previous successes of the enemy, it was unable to prevent the capture of Prague, where the Elector of Bavaria, now master of the capital, was crowned King of Bohemia. At this critical moment Maria Theresa was opposed to nearly all the powers of Europe, and possessed but a solitary ally—England; but, with her assistance, she made a bold and glorious stand, and at length contrived, by wise concessions, to pacify the Kings of Prussia and Poland, and the Elector of Saxony. The war, prosecuted with unwearied energy and vigour, now brought her a rich harvest of

victory ; and, in 1743, she was invested at Prague with the regal insignia of Bohemia, and placed on the brow of her husband the imperial crown of Germany. The tardy peace of Aix-la-Chapelle fully acknowledged her rights, ratified her conquests, and confirmed her in all her dominions, with the exception of Silesia, which, in the hour of her extreme necessity, she had reluctantly ceded to Prussia. That gem of her crown, indeed, she was still unwilling to surrender, and though for a time compelled to yield, she secretly formed a league with the Elector of Saxony, the King of Poland, and the Empress Catherine II. of Russia, mainly with a view to its recovery. The combination was discovered by the great Frederic, who, by his sagacity and decision, frustrated the plans of his august rival, and ultimately dissolved the confederacy. Still, Maria Theresa adhered to her purpose, and foiled in the North, formed an alliance with France,

while Frederic, assisted by England, boldly anticipated the impending shock by striking the first blow, and, marching into Bohemia, commenced the long struggle of the Seven Years' War. Both sides maintained the strife with varying success, but equal obstinacy, till, at last, the scale was turned in favour of the Empress by the accession of Russia, which brought the Prussian hero to the brink of ruin. But the character of Frederic rose with the difficulties and the exigencies of his situation, and by incredible efforts, by judicious and energetic movements, and by his strategic skill, he finally extricated himself from his dangerous position, and, on the conclusion of peace, remained in undisputed possession of Silesia. On the other hand, Maria Theresa obtained the imperial succession for her son Joseph, elected King of the Romans, and, by the events of the war, fused and permanently consolidated the various scattered elements

of Austrian power. She was an unwilling accessory to the dismemberment of Poland, which she opposed as well from policy as principle ; but her scruples, finding no support from her ministers, were overruled by the young King Joseph, who, urging religious arguments, interested her piety in the measure. This was her last act in the great councils of Europe.

Successful and renowned in war, Maria Theresa was no less eminent in peace, and while she upheld the integrity, continually sought to advance the interests and promote the permanent prosperity of her dominions. She was a munificent benefactress of the arts and sciences, and encouraged and rewarded every useful invention. Literature, so long neglected, obtained her special protection, and she sought to develop the same taste in her subjects, by the establishment and liberal endowment of numerous schools and colleges. She was equally at-

tentive to the interests of commerce, and, under her auspices, new sources of trade were opened, roads and canals constructed, spacious harbours formed, and manufactures of every kind fostered and extended. No sovereign was ever more beloved, and, from the outset of her long and troubled reign, she obtained and well merited the title of “mother of her people.”

The career and fate of her daughter, the beautiful and unfortunate Marie Antoinette, offer a lamentable contrast to that of the Empress-Queen. From the peaceful end of the one, we turn reluctantly to, what may be considered the death-chamber of the other—the revolutionary Hall of Judgment, and its inhuman tribunal. The once lovely Queen now retains no trace either of youth or beauty; her wan features are furrowed and disfigured by wrinkles; her hair is whitened by sorrow; her form bent and drooping. Paris has arrayed all its refuse and all its

sin to witness and applaud her abasement; and *sans culottes*, and dissolute, abandoned women throng the avenues, the galleries, and the court. Marie Antoinette stands mute before them, her hands clasped tightly together, as if to repress her outraged feelings. She listens with calm dignity, but deep inward emotion, to the insulting and abusive tirade of the public accuser as he successively charges her with the sanguinary excesses of the Medicis and the vices of Messalina; but when, to these shocking and unfounded imputations, he adds the diabolical guilt of Agrippina, nature can no longer be restrained, and she bursts into a passionate exclamation of agony and horror. The most obdurate could not resist so moving and sublime an appeal; and the unsexed furies of the reign of terror, the spawn and progeny of the revolution, retaining nothing of woman but her form, vehemently screamed forth their disapprobation of the charge.

Still it was repeated ; and the fallen Queen, standing at the bar of this monstrous court, had to sustain the same cruel ordeal, without respite or refreshment, for twenty weary hours, the long night having passed away before it was announced that only her life could expiate her crimes. Not till she was once more in the solitude of her dungeon did she yield to the crushing weight of her misfortunes, and seek a woman's relief in tears. But even in this bitter moment, the conviction of an existence to come, which she was soon to enter, afforded consolation and fortitude, raising her stricken soul from earth to Heaven. Her last thoughts were given to her children. "I embrace thee," she wrote to a cherished friend, "and my poor dear children. My God ! how painful it is to be forced to leave them for ever !"

A miserable cart conveyed the daughter of Maria Theresa to the place of execution. Seated on a bare board, with her hands

pinioned behind her, she was dragged to the Place de la Revolution through a mob of infuriated demons, whose yells and execrations rent the air. Once only she betrayed emotion, when her eye, suddenly awaking to the objects around, caught a glimpse of the distant Tuileries, the scene of her brief season of happiness and power. But the delusive glories of the world were now as nothing to her; she was already at the foot of the scaffold; and with a light step, she ascended the fatal platform. The executioner took off her neckerchief and cap, disclosing those luxuriant tresses, so early grey, which had once been a brighter adornment than the queenly diadem, and in a moment the head of Marie Antoinette lay bleeding in the dust.

This stormy era was essentially fatal to Royalty, whether inherited from a line of ancestors, or derived from the more novel source of popular suffrage; and France,

after bringing her hereditary sovereign to the block, calmly beheld the Queen of her choice hurled from the throne. Josephine Beauharnais was a widow when she first attracted the attention of Napoleon. She was a colonial beauty, being by birth a Creole; and in her infancy, a negro sorceress had predicted, what was forgotten till after the event, that she would one day be more than a Queen. Her husband had been a general in the army, but during the reign of terror, he was suspected of being noble, and for this heinous crime was condemned to the guillotine. After the Revolt of the Sections, her son Eugene, then only ten years of age, presented himself before the youthful General Buonaparte, and solicited the restoration of his father's sword. Napoleon was not more touched by the petition than by the appearance and demeanour of the suppliant, and kindly handed him the

weapon, which the child, as he pressed it to his bosom, bathed with tears. This increased the sympathy of the hero, and he treated Eugene with so much consideration, that on the following day, Madame Beauharnais called at his quarters to make her acknowledgments; and at their first interview, Napoleon, amidst the anxieties and perplexities of his situation, was captivated by her suavity and her beauty. An acquaintance commenced, and, growing daily more tender, speedily led to their marriage, an event which, twelve days after its celebration, procured for the fortunate bridegroom the command of the army of Italy. Rapidly he rose, like a rocket—or rather a comet, dazzling and bewildering; and Josephine, whom the Revolution had but lately thrown into a dungeon, was now solemnly invested with the imperial crown.

Her *régime* was eminently splendid, and,

at the same time, had the higher merit of being useful—for she afforded both literature and art her constant and munificent protection. Under her auspices, society, so long convulsed, again took form and shape; and the frightful reign of anarchy was succeeded by that of order and virtue.

One of the most interesting traits in the character of Josephine was her complete devotion to Napoleon, who himself said that he was the man she loved best in the world. Bourrienne relates, on the authority of the Emperor, that she was always ready to attend him, at any hour, and under all circumstances; and would persist in being his companion in his most fatiguing journeys. “If I stepped into my carriage at midnight,” remarked the hero, “to my surprise I would find Josephine prepared, although I had had no idea of her accompanying me. ‘But,’ I would say, ‘you cannot possibly go: the

journey is too great, and is beyond your strength.' 'Not at all.' 'But I must set out instantly.' 'Well, I am quite ready.' 'Impossible! you will want no end of baggage.' 'Oh no! it is all packed, and I am prepared to start.' " And so Napoleon was obliged to yield.

What a consolation, had he but retained in his fall this tender partner of his prosperity! He might then have exclaimed with Mithridates, that he should never cease to be a monarch, so long as he possessed Josephine. But the career of the unhappy Empress, not less marvellous than his own, was destined to have another end; and she was raised to the highest point of human greatness that she might know the most bitter humiliation.

Such are the strange vicissitudes of life, not more apparent in the history of the past than in the events now passing before

us, and which, within a few years, have advanced the living representative of Napoleon, as rapidly as Josephine, from a prison to a throne.

Here this history must end—from the exhaustion, not of the subject, but of our limited space. Indeed, it may safely be asserted that in no age has woman appeared in a nobler light than the present, since in England alone we so lately possessed such heroines as Grace Darling and Lady Sale, and can still boast of Miss Nightingale and her assistants. Royalty, too, continues to present some of the brightest examples of the sex, and the sway of Victoria is endeared to the hearts of millions. Nor would it be possible to adduce a higher illustration of the female character, in connexion either with the tender relations of

domestic life, or the influences of her exalted station, than that august Queen, who has graciously honoured this book with the countenance of her name.

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CLASSIFIED INDEX.

Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

	Pages
Bayldon on Valuing Rents, etc.	6
Caird's Letters on Agriculture	7
Cecil's Stud Farm	7
Loudon's Encyclopedia of Agriculture	14
" Self Instruction for Farmers, etc	14
" (Mrs.) Lady's Country Companion	14
Low's Elements of Agriculture	15
" Domesticated Animals	14

Arts, Manufactures, and Architecture.

Bourne's Catechism of the Steam Engine	6
" On the Screw Propeller	6
Brande's Dictionary of Science, etc	6
Chevreul on Colour	8
Cresy's Encyclo. of Civil Engineering	8
Fastlake on Oil Painting	8
Gwilt's Encyclopedia of Architecture	9
Jameson's Sacred and Legendary Art	11
" Commonplace Book	12
Loudon's Rural Architecture	14
Moseley's Engineering and Architecture	14
Richardson's Art of Horsemanship	19
Steam Engine, by the Artisan Club	6
Tate on Strength of Materials	22
Ure's Dictionary of Arts, etc.	24

Biography.

Bodenstedt and Wagner's Schamyl	23
Brightwell's Memorials of Ople	18
Bunsen's Hippolytus	7
Chesterton's Autobiography	8
Clinton's (Fynes) Autobiography	8
Cockayne's Marshal Turenne	23
Freeman's Life of Kirby	12
Haydon's Autobiography, by Taylor	10
Holcroft's Memoirs	23
Holland's (Lord) Memoirs	10
Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia	13
Mauder's Biographical Treasury	16
Memoir of the Duke of Wellington	23
Memoirs of James Montgomery	16
Merivale's Memoirs of Cicero	16
Russell's Memoirs of Moore	17

Russell's Life of Lord William Russell	19
Southey's Life of Wesley	21
" Life and Correspondence	21
Stephen's Ecclesiastical Biography	21
Taylor's Loyola	22
" Wesley	22
Townsend's Eminent Judges	22
Waterton's Autobiography and Essays	24

Books of General Utility.

Acton's Modern Cookery Book	5
Black's Treatise on Brewing	6
Cabinet Gazetteer	7
" Lawyer	7
Cust's Invalid's Own Book	8
Hints on Etiquette	10
Hudson's Executor's Guide	11
" On Making Wills	11
Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia	13
Loudon's Self Instruction	14
" Lady's Companion	14
" (Mrs.) Amateur Gardener	14
Mauder's Treasury of Knowledge	16
" Biographical Treasury	16
" Scientific Treasury	16
" Treasury of History	16
" Natural History	16
Pocket and the Stud	10
Pycroft's English Reading	19
Ryce's Medical Guide	19
Rich's Companion to Latin Dictionary	19
Riddle's Latin Dictionaries	19
Richardson's Art of Horsemanship	19
Roget's English Thesaurus	19
Rowton's Debater	19
Short Whist	20
Thomson's Interest Tables	22
Traveller's Library	23
Webster's Domestic Economy	24
Willich's Popular Tables	24
Willmot's Abridgment of Blackstone's Commentaries	24

Botany and Gardening.

Conversations on Botany	8
Hooker's British Flora	10
" Guide to Kew Gardens	10

	Pages
Lindley's Introduction to Botany	14
" Theory of Horticulture	12
London's Hortus Britannicus	14
" (Mss.) Amateur Gardener	14
" Self-Instruction for Gardeners	14
" Encyclopedia of Trees & Shrubs	14
" " Gardening	14
" " Plants	14
Rivers's Rose Amateur's Guide	19

Chronology.

Blair's Chronological Tables	6
Bunsen's Ancient Egypt	7
Haydn's Beatson's Index	10
Nicolas's Chronology of History	18

Commerce and Mercantile Affairs.

Atkinson's Shipping Laws	5
Francis On Life Assurance	9
Loch's Sailor's Guide	14
Lorimer's Letters to a Young Master Mariner	14
M'Culloch's Commerce and Navigation	15
Thomson's Interest Tables	22

Criticism, History, and Memoirs.

Austin's Germany	5
Balfour's Sketches of Literature	5
Blair's Chron. and Historical Tables	6
Bunsen's Ancient Egypt	7
" Hippolytus	7
Burton's History of Scotland	7
Chalybaeus's Speculative Philosophy	8
Conybeare and Howson's St. Paul	8
Eastlake's History of Oil Painting	8
Erskine's History of India	9
Francis's Annals of Life Assurance	9
Gleig's Leipzig Campaign	28
Gurney's Historical Sketches	9
Hamilton's Discussions in Philosophy, etc.	9
Haydon's Autobiography, by Taylor	10
Holland's (Lord) Foreign Reminiscences	10
" " Whig Party	10
Jeffrey's (Lord) Contributions	12
Kemble's Anglo-Saxons in England	12
Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia	13
Macaulay's Crit. and Hist. Essays	15
" History of England	15
" Speeches	15
Mackintosh's Miscellaneous Works	15
" History of England	15
M'Culloch's Geographical Dictionary	15
Martineau's Church History	16
Maunders's Treasury of History	16
Memoir of the Duke of Wellington	23
Merivale's History of Rome	16
" Roman Republic	16
Milner's Church History	16
Moore's (Thomas) Memoirs, etc.	17
Mure's Greek Literature	17
Ranke's Ferdinand and Maximilian	28
Rich's Companion to Latin Dictionary	19
Riddle's Latin Dictionaries	19
Rogers's Essays from Edinburgh Review	19
Roger's English Theasurus	19
Russell's (Lady Rachel) Letters	19
" Life of Lord William Russell	19
St. John's Indian Archipelago	19
Schmitt's History of Greece	20

	Pages
Smith's Sacred Annals	21
Southey's The Doctor etc.	21
Stephen's Ecclesiastical Biography	21
" Lectures on French History	21
Sydney Smith's Works	21
" Select Works	23
" Lectures on Moral Philosophy	21
Taylor's Loyola	22
" Wesley	22
Thirlwall's History of Greece	22
Townsend's State Trials	22
Turkey and Christendom	23
Turner's Anglo-Saxons	24
" Middle Ages	24
" Sacred History of the World	22
Zumpt's Latin Grammar	24

Geography and Atlases.

Butler's Geography and Atlases	7
Cabinet Gazetteer	7
Durrieu's Morocco	23
Hall's Large Library Atlas	9
Hughes's Australian Colonies	23
Jesse's Russia and the War	12
Johnston's General Gazetteer	12
M'Culloch's Geographical Dictionary	15
" Russia and Turkey	23
Milner's Baltic Sea	16
Murray's Encyclopedia of Geography	18
Sharp's British Gazetteer	20
Wheeler's Geography of Herodotus	24

Juvenile Books.

Amy Herbert	20
Corner's Children's Sunday Book	8
Earl's Daughter (The)	20
Experience of Life	20
Gertrude	20
Howitt's Boy's Country Book	11
" (Marv) Children's Year	11
Katharine Ashton	20
Lady Una and her Queendom	12
Laneton Parsonage	20
Mrs. Marcet's Conversations	15 & 16
Margaret Percival	20
Pycroft's English Reading	19

Medicine and Surgery.

Bull's Hints to Mothers	6
" Management of Children	6
Copland's Dictionary of Medicine	8
Cust's Invalid's Own Book	8
Holland's Mental Physiology	10
Latham On Diseases of the Heart	12
Little on Treatment of Deformities	14
Moore On Health, Disease, and Remedy	17
Pereira On Food and Diet	18
Psychological Inquiries	18
Reece's Medical Guide	19

Miscellaneous and General Literature.

Atkinson's Sheriff Law	5
Austin's Sketches of German Life	5
Carlisle's Lectures and Addresses	23
Chalybaeus's Speculative Philosophy	8
Defence of Eclipse of Faith	9
Eclipse of Faith	8
Greg's Essays on Political and Social Science	9

	Pages
Haydn's Book of Dignities	10
Hole's Essay on Mechanics' Institutions	20
Holland's Mental Physiology	10
Hooker's Kew Guide	10
Howitt's Rural Life of England	11
Visits to Remarkable Places	11
Jameson's Commonplace Book	12
Jeffrey's (Lord) Contributions	12
Last of the Old Squires	18
London's Lady's Country Companion	14
Macaulay's Critical and Historical Essays	15
Speeches	15
Mackintosh's (Sir J.) Miscellaneous Works	15
Memoirs of a Maitre d'Armes	23
Maitland's Church in the Catacombs	16
Pascal's Works, by Pearce	18
Pycroft's English Reading	19
Rich's Companion to Latin Dictionary	19
Riddle's Latin Dictionaries	19
Rowton's Debater	19
Seaward's Narrative of his Shipwreck	20
Sir Roger De Coverley	21
Smith's (Rev. Sydney) Works	21
Southey's Common-Place Books	21
The Doctor etc.	23
Souvestre's Attic Philosopher	23
Confessions of a Working Man	23
Stephen's Essays	21
Stow's Training System	21
Thomson's Outline of the Laws of Thought	22
Townsend's State Trials	22
Willich's Popular Tales	24
Yonge's English Greek Lexicon	24
Latin Gradus	24
Zumpt's Latin Grammar	24

Natural History in General.

Catlow's Popular Conchology	7
Ephemera and Young on the Salmon	9
Gosse's Natural History of Jamaica	9
Kemp's Natural History of Creation	23
Kirby and Spence's Entomology	12
Lee's Elements of Natural History	12
Maunder's Treasury of Natural History	16
Turton's Shells of the British Islands	24
Waterton's Essays on Natural History	24
Youatt's The Dog	24
The Horse	24

1-Volume Encyclopædias and Dictionaries.

Blaine's Rural Sports	6
Brande's Science, Literature, and Art	6
Copland's Dictionary of Medicine	8
Cressy's Civil Engineering	8
Cressy's Architecture	9
Johnston's Geographical Dictionary	12
London's Agriculture	14
Rural Architecture	14
Gardening	14
Plants	14
Trees and Shrubs	14
McCulloch's Geographical Dictionary	15
Dictionary of Commerce	15
Murray's Encyclopædia of Geography	17
Sharp's British Gazetteer	20
Ure's Dictionary of Arts, etc.	24
Webster's Domestic Economy	24

Religious and Moral Works.

Amy Herbert	20
Atkinson on the Church	5
Bloomfield's Greek Testaments	6
Annotations on ditto	6

	Pages
Calvert's Wife's Manual	7
Conybeare and Howson's St. Paul	8
Corner's Sunday Book	8
Dale's Domestic Liturgy	8
Defence of <i>Eclipse of Faith</i>	9
Discipline	8
Earl's Daughter (The)	20
Eclipse of Faith	8
Englishman's Greek Concordance	9
Heb. and Chald. Concord.	9
Experience of Life (The)	20
Gertrude	20
Harrison's Light of the Forge	10
Hook's (Dr.) Lectures on Passion Week	10
Horne's Introduction to Scriptures	11
Abridgment of ditto	11
Hulbert on Job	11
Jameson's Sacred Legends	11
Monastic Legends	11
Legends of the Madonna	11
Jeremy Taylor's Works	12
Katharine Ashton	20
Kippis's Hymns	12
Lady Una and her Queendom	12
Laneton Parsonage	20
Letters to My Unknown Friends	12
on Happiness	12
Litton's Church of Christ	14
Maitland's Church in the Catacombs	16
Margaret Percival	20
Marineau's Church History	16
Millner's Church of Christ	16
Montgomery's Original Hymns	16
Moore on the Use of the Body	17
Soul and Body	17
a Man and his Motives	17
Mormonism	23
Neale's Closing Scene	18
Resting Places of the Just	17
Riches that bring no Sorrow	17
Risen from the Ranks	17
Newman's (J. H.) Discourses	18
Ranke's Ferdinand and Maximilian	28
Readings for Lent	20
Confirmation	20
Robinson's Lexicon to the Greek Testament	19
Saints our Example	20
Self-Denial	20
Sermon on the Mount	20
Illuminated	20
Sinclair's Journey of Life	21
Smith's (Sydney) Moral Philosophy	21
(G.) Sacred Annals	21
Southey's Life of Wesley	21
Stephen's (Sir J.) Ecclesiastical Biography	21
Taylor's Loyola	22
Wesley	22
Theologia Germanica	22
Thumb Bible (The)	22
Turner's Sacred History	22

Poetry and the Drama.

Arnold's Poems	5
Alkin's (Dr.) British Poets	5
Baillie's (Joanna) Poetical Works	5
Barter's Iliad of Homer	5
Bode's Ballads from Herodotus	6
Calvert's Wife's Manual	7
Flowers and their Kindred Thoughts	18
Goldsmith's Poems, illustrated	9
Kent's Aletheia	12
Kippis's Hymns	12
L. E. L.'s Poetical Works	12

	Pages
Linwood's Anthologia Oxoniensis	14
Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome	16
Montgomery's Poetical Works	16
Original Hymns	16
Moore's Poetical Works	17
Lalla Rookh	17
Irish Melodies	17
Songs and Ballads	17
Shakespeare, by Bowdler	20
Sentiments and Similes	11
Southey's Poetical Works	21
British Poets	21
Thomson's Seasons, illustrated	22
Thornton's Zokrab	22
Watts's Lyrics of the Heart	24

Political Economy & Statistics.

Banfield's Statistical Companion	6
Calrd's Letters on Agriculture	7
Francis on Life Assurance	9
Greg's Essays on Political and Social Science	9
Laing's Notes of a Traveller	12 & 24
McCulloch's Geographical Dictionary	15
Dictionary of Commerce	15
London	23
Statistics of the British Empire	15
Marcet's Political Economy	16
Willich's Popular Tables	24

The Sciences in General and Mathematics.

Bourne's Catechism of the Steam Engine	6
on the Screw Propeller	6
Brande's Dictionary of Science, etc.	6
Lectures on Organic Chemistry	6
Cressy's Civil Engineering	8
De la Beche's Geology of Cornwall, etc.	8
Geological Observer	8
De la Rive's Electricity	8
Paraday's Non-Metallic Elements	9
Fallom's Marvels of Science	9
Herschel's Outlines of Astronomy	10
Holland's Mental Physiology	10
Humboldt's Aspects of Nature	11
Cosmos	11
Hunt's Researches on Sight	11
Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopædia	13
Marcet's (Mrs.) Conversations	16 & 16
Moseley's Engineering and Architecture	17
Owen's Lectures on Comparative Anatomy	18
Our Coal Fields and our Coal Pits	23
Peschel's Elements of Physics	18
Phillips's Fossils of Cornwall, etc.	18
Mineralogy	18
Guide to Geology	18
Portlock's Geology of Londonderry	18
Smee's Electro-Metallurgy	21
Steam Engine, by the Artisan Club	6
Tate on Strength of Materials	22
Todd's Tables of Circles	22
Wilson's Electricity and the Electric Telegraph	23

Rural Sports.

Baker's Rifle and Hound in Ceylon	5
Berkeley's Reminiscences	6
Blaine's Dictionary of Sports	6
Cecil's Stable Practice	8
Records of the Chase	7

	Pages
Cecil's Stud Farm	7
The Cricket Field	8
Ephemera on Angling	9
Book of the Salmon	9
The Hunting Field	10
Loudon's Lady's Country Companion	14
Pocket and the Stud	10
Practical Horsemanship	10
Pulman's Fly-Fishing	19
Richardson's Horsemanship	19
St John's Sporting Rambles	19
Stable Talk and Table Talk	10
Stonehenge on the Greyhound	22
The Stud, for Practical Purposes	10

Veterinary Medicine, etc.

Cecil's Stable Practice	8
Stud Farm	7
The Hunting Field	10
Morton's Veterinary Pharmacy	17
Pocket and the Stud	10
Practical Horsemanship	10
Richardson's Horsemanship	19
Stable Talk and Table Talk	10
The Stud for Practical Purposes	10
Youatt's The Dog	24
The Horse	24

Voyages and Travels.

Baker's Rifle and Hound in Ceylon	5
Barrow's Continental Tour	28
Carlisle's Turkey and Greece	7
De Custine's Russia	23
Eöthen	23
Ferguson's Swiss Men and Mountains	24
Forester and Biddulph's Norway	9
Gironière's Philippines	23
Hill's Travels in Siberia	10
Hope's Brittany and the Bible	23
Chase in Brittany	23
Howitt's Art Student in Munich	11
Huc's Tartary, Thibet, and China	23
Hughes's Australian Colonies	24
Humbley's Indian Journal	11
Humboldt's Aspects of Nature	11
Jameson's Canada	24
Jermann's Pictures from St. Petersburg	23
Laing's Norway	23
Notes of a Traveller	12 & 22
Macintosh's Turkey and Black Sea	15
Oldmixon's Piccadilly to Peru	18
Osborn's Arctic Journal	18
Peel's Nubian Desert	18
Pfeiffer's Voyage round the World	23
Power's New Zealand Sketches	18
Richardson's Arctic Boat Voyage	19
Richardson's Narrative of his Shipwreck	30
St. John's (H.) Indian Archipelago	19
(J. A.) Isis	19
There and Back again	20
(Hon. F.) Rambles	19
Sutherland's Arctic Voyage	23
Traveller's Library	23
Werne's African Wanderings	23

Works of Fiction.

Arnold's Oakfield	5
Lady Willoughby's Diary	24
Macdonald's Villa Verocchlo	15
Sir Roger De Coverley	21
Southey's The Doctor etc.	21

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